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National Report on the Governance of the Asylum Reception System in Finland

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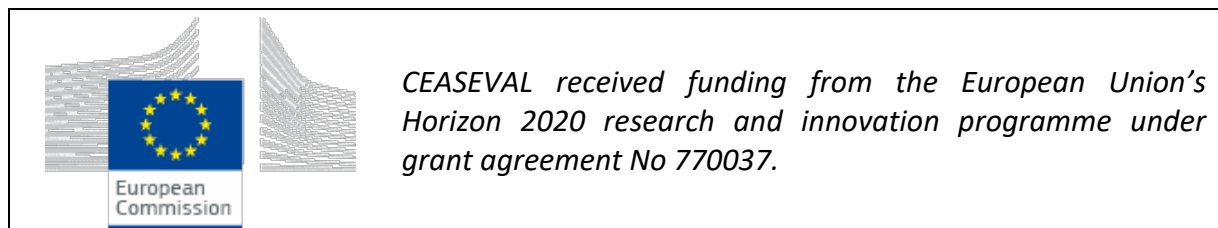
National Report on the Governance of the Asylum Reception System in Finland

Östen Wahlbeck

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Abstract

The system of governance of the national reception system in Finland can be described as a centralised state-led system with a top-down decision-making, where the municipalities and civil society are key partners in implementation processes, but they can only indirectly influence the governance of the reception system. Reception and integration are formally two different areas of practice, with the state as responsible for reception measures and the municipalities responsible for integration measures. The centralisation of the system has involved the strengthening of the role of the Finnish Immigration Service. The administrative reforms involve a long history of centralisation and Europeanisation of the administration, which predates the so-called migration crisis of 2015. A convergence of the functioning, accessibility and quality of reception services is an aim of the centralised national system. Yet, the system also involves structural conflicts of interest between local and national perspectives, which are strengthened by the legal and administrative division of reception and integration into two different areas of practice.

Keywords: Finland, Europeanisation, Reception, Integration, Resettlement, CEAS

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Introduction

This is a CEASEVAL country report that maps the formal governance structure of the national reception systems in Finland. The outline of the report follows the Guidelines for Work Package 3 – Task 3.2: (Deliverable D.3.2).

The population of Finland was 5.5 million in 2018 and it is one of the smaller countries in the European Union, which Finland joined in 1995. The country is sparsely populated (an average population density of 17 inhabitants per square kilometre), and distances may be long, which has a relevance for reception practices. Today, the country has a relatively clear and formal structure of governance of asylum issues. In general, the system of governance can be described as centralised system with a top-down decision-making. Yet, as will be described in this report, the role of the local municipalities and civil society, including the Finnish Red Cross, is of crucial importance in many aspects. The service and governance structures are largely part of the extensive general welfare state structures of Finnish society, which traditionally tend to be similar to the neighbouring Scandinavian countries. The state authorities are formally responsible for reception, while the local municipality provides services to its permanent residents, including those who have received a positive decision on their asylum application. Finland is not a federal state, but the municipalities have a degree of autonomy to decide about those tasks that according to law fall within their responsibilities. The social and health services are residence based, which is a central feature of the immigrant integration policies of the country (cf. Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck 2012; Koikkalainen forthcoming). Yet, asylum seekers are not regarded as permanent residents before they receive a positive decision on their asylum application. Thus, as will be outlined in this report, reception and integration are formally two different areas of practice. This clear distinction between reception and integration measures provides a bureaucratic clarity of the system, but may also create some practical challenges and can be a source of very different priorities, even occasional disagreements, among the various actors involved in reception and integration measures.

1. The Background: the Initial Design of the National Governance of Asylum Seekers' Reception and Main Reforms

As a small country, Finland has had a tendency to emphasise the role of international law and agreements in its formulation of international policies. In 1968, Finland acceded to both the Refugee Convention and the Protocol, and Finland has also been a significant contributor to the budget of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Another aspect of this international co-operation has been the early introduction of an annual quota for refugees. The country is part of the Schengen area and has, in general, supported the development of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (Välimäki 2018; Wahlbeck 2019).

There are two distinctive historical features that explain how the governance of the reception was designed in Finland. Firstly, the country has developed its formal reception and integration policies as an extension of its traditional and fairly bureaucratic Nordic welfare state policies. Secondly, for a long period of time most of the refugees in Finland arrived as part of an organised resettlement of refugees. Thus, although the number of asylum seekers has been relatively low, a resettlement of refugees has a long history in Finland. Refugees have arrived in Finland both as asylum seekers and within the framework of organised resettlement programmes administered by the UNHCR. Finland has previously been a country of emigration, but gradually turned into a country of immigration in the 1980s.

Refugees only account for a small part of all immigrants, but still have been the focus of heated debates on immigration (cf. Pyrhönen & Wahlbeck 2018).

Almost half of all immigrants live in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In addition, all larger cities have more immigrants than the average, while in rural areas the number of immigrants is small. However, quota refugees are resettled all over the country, and all municipalities are encouraged by the state to make official agreements with the state concerning the resettlement of refugees. Still, there is a clear tendency that refugees over time tend to move independently from the small municipalities to larger cities (Wahlbeck 1999; Martikainen et al. 2012). As will be described in this report, there is no official distribution quota of asylum seekers or refugees within the country. Although government policies have been to distribute refugees, the resettlement in municipalities has in practice been decided case-by-case, largely depending on the willingness of municipalities to sign agreements with the state authorities. Furthermore, there is no official set criteria for the location of reception centres, and my interpretation is that the choice of location in practice depend on a variety of different issues, which I present in chapter 2.2. in this report.

Resettlement of Quota Refugees

The first organised resettlement in the country occurred when about one hundred refugees from Chile were accepted by a government decision in 1973. Between 1973 and 1977 a total of 182 refugees came to Finland from Latin America (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003). The resettlement of quota refugees in cooperation with the UNHCR started in 1979, when the first resettled refugees from Vietnam arrived in Finland. Most of the early refugees were resettled within the vicinity of Helsinki. Since 1986, the Finnish Parliament sets an annual refugee quota as part of the budget process. Under its refugee quota, Finland admits persons recognised as refugees by the UNHCR. Most of the quota refugees arrive from refugee camps in countries close to their country of origin. Since 1987, Finland has been one of about 25 resettlement countries admitting quota refugees each year (Ministry of the Interior 2015d). In the 2000s, the refugee quota has generally been 750. The Ministry of the Interior prepares a decision on the origin of the refugees, which is based on a UNHCR proposal submitted to Finland. After this decision, UNHCR submits a list of persons from which the Finnish authorities select the quota refugees to be admitted to Finland. The selection is often made after interviews in the refugee camps in question. The Finnish Immigration Service provides residence permits to quota refugees, who as a rule are granted refugee status in accordance with the Geneva Convention. According to the Ministry of the Interior (2015d), the need for international protection is the most important criteria for resettlement. In addition, the chances of successful integration are also assessed when quota refugees are selected. In its quota policy, Finland emphasises the resettlement of the most vulnerable groups, such as families with children and women in a difficult position (widows, single parents and single women). About ten per cent of the annual quota is reserved for refugees considered as emergency cases (Ministry of the Interior 2015d).

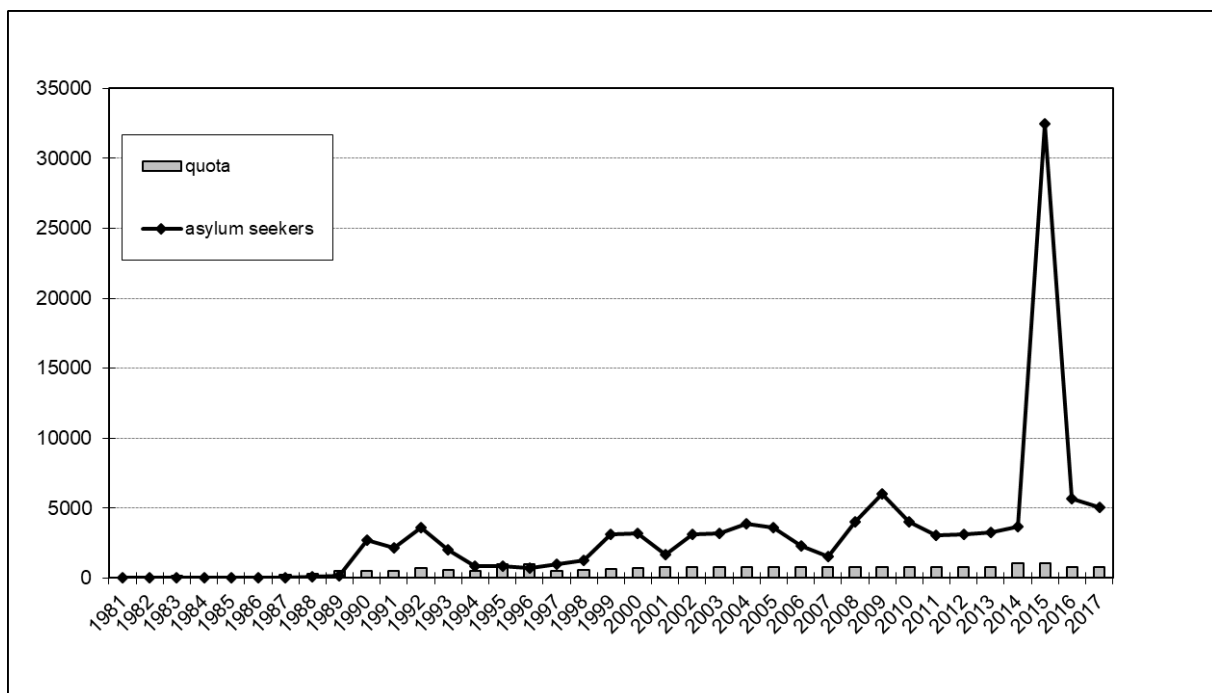
Asylum Seekers

The asylum seekers arriving in Finland were a few individual cases until the 1990s, when the numbers started to grow. The first large group of asylum seekers were Somali refugees who arrived across the eastern border with Russia, yet the numbers dropped after Finland in the mid-1990s redefined Russia and Estonia as safe countries of transit (SOPEMI 1995). Thus, the number of asylum seekers has until the year 2015 been relatively low in comparison to the larger numbers in neighbouring Scandinavian countries. The low number can, at least partly, be explained by the geographical location of Finland in

northernmost Europe. Direct flight connections from conflict areas are few and the eastern border of the country tends to be strictly guarded by Russia. Thus, the arrival of 32 746 asylum seekers in the year 2015 was something that had not been experienced before.

In most years in the 2000s, Finland has had a few thousand asylum seekers. In 2014, their number stood at 3651. The total number of quota refugees, asylum seekers who have received international protection, and family re-unification cases have been between 1000 and 3000 in most years in the 2000s. In 2015, there was a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers and in total 32 476 asylum seekers arrived in Finland (Finnish Immigration Service 2018). The annual quota of refugees and the annual number of asylum seekers are described in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Annual refugee quota and number of asylum seekers 1981-2017.



Sources: Statistics Finland (2019) and the Finnish Immigration Service (2018).

1.1. The Initial Governance Design

As described above, Finland has a relatively long history of resettlement policies. The division of work between local municipalities and the state has stayed the same for a long time, with the municipalities taking care of immigrant social and health issues and integration programmes, and the state institutions taking care of asylum seeker admission, reception and policy issues. The main provider of public services in Finland is the local municipality. The activities of municipalities are broad and clearly defined by law, which also defines the division of work between the state, the municipality and the regional authorities. A key law is the Local Government Act (410/2015), but the tasks and share of responsibilities of the public administration is outlined in numerous laws and decrees.

When the reception system initially was developed in the 1980s, a key state authority was the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, where an Office for Refugee Affairs coordinated the administration of both reception and resettlement programmes. The refugees were few, but still made up a large part of the total immigration to Finland. Thus, the humanitarian approach of social services dominated the migration policies and discourse in the 1980s. In the 1990s and 2000s this gradually gave way to discourses and policies for labour migration and more diverse forms of immigration. The Ministry of

Labour have always played an important role in immigration issues, and the integration policies have actively supported an integration of refugees and migrants into the labour market (cf. Martikainen et al. 2012).

The reception centres in Finland are, and have always been, funded by the state, and the opening of a centre has required a decision by the relevant ministry. All asylum seekers administratively belong to one centre that provides reception services to the asylum seeker in question. Initially, the running of the first centres was overseen by state regional authorities, which had the general responsibility to monitor the health and social sector. Already the first reception centres were run by different operators, either the state, a municipality or the Finnish Red Cross. A general custom seems to have emerged whereby the municipality was informed and gave its political approval for the establishment of reception centres. Initially, the local police force was responsible for the asylum interviews and involved in asylum decisions.

Before the 2000s, the Ministry of the Interior played a more marginal role in migration policy issue, as the ministry was mainly in charge of the Police, the Border Guard and the authorities providing residence permits to foreign citizens. However, already in 2003, civil servants of the Ministry of the Interior strongly argued for a large formal role of the Ministry of the Interior and its Directorate of immigration, which, as argued by the civil servants, would enable a centralisation, better overall control and a similar administrative structure of immigration affairs as in many other European countries. At this period of time, an administrative move of immigration affairs to this particular ministry was far from self-evident, since the expertise and experience in migration policy and immigrant integration was still mainly found in other ministries, in the local communities and among NGOs.

1.2. Main Reforms Throughout the 2000s

The Development of the Finnish Immigration Service

The interviews made for this report indicate the major change in the structure and functioning of the national system of reception has been the strengthening of the role of the Finnish Immigration Service. This was mentioned as the key change by all the interviewed civil servants, they also identified the government as the main actor in this change (WP3_UH_E011_P; WP3_UH_E012_P; WP3_UH_E013_P; WP3_UH_E017_P). The interviewees at a local level found it more difficult to identify national changes and many answered that they did not sufficiently know the national system of reception. A senior civil servant at the Ministry of the Interior explained:

The major change in the structure and the functioning of the national reception system has been the strengthening of the role of Migri [The Finnish Immigration Service]. The change of Migri since 2010 to have a broader role - not only as a decision maker - has been the major change in the administration of reception in Finland. [...] Today, the administrative responsibility is much broader and includes both the control of the system and the decisions that are made in the system (WP3_UH_E011_P).

When the interviewed civil servants in this study were asked about the initiative of these changes, “the government” or “politicians” are mentioned as the one that made the initiative, or more simply: “Changes are based on legislation. National legislation is what decides administrative changes” (WP3_UH_E011_P). According to the documents consulted for this report, a key legislative and organisational reform fundamentally changed the formal structures of the Finnish migration

organisation at the state level on the 1 January 2008. The reform created a new administrative entity at the Ministry of the Interior: “The Finnish Immigration Service” (often referred to as “Migri”) (in the national languages: Maahanmuuttovirasto - Migrationsverket). In the following years, this entity received an increasing number of administrative tasks, a process that will be described below. The reform followed the Government Programme of Prime Minister Vanhanen (Government of Finland 2007). The government programme largely followed the suggestions previously presented by civil servants at the Ministry of the Interior in the early 2000s; and more specifically suggestions made in a report commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior on developing migration administration and the function of the Finnish Immigration Service, the report of the Special Rapporteur, Ambassador Ole Norrback (2008).

Information about administrative reforms are found in the Finnish European Migration Network (EMN) annual reports, which provide an overview of legal and political developments in Finland. The information in the reports are mainly gathered from the Finnish authorities themselves, and the EMN annual reports can therefore have an administrative bias or reflect the government perspective, but the reports still provide a good overview of developments that can be analysed together with other sources. The first available EMN report is for the year 2008, and it reports on the concentration of migration, asylum and integration issues under the subordination of the Ministry of the Interior (EMN 2009). The administrative change included: The Migration Policy Team of the Policy Department; The Migration and Working Permit Team of the Execution Department of the Ministry of Labour; the Advisory Board of Ethnic Relations; the reception centres; the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities and the National Discrimination Tribunal, which all were moved from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, the name of the Directorate of Immigration was changed to the Finnish Immigration Service. Additionally, the Ministry of the Interior’s Immigration Department was changed to the Migration Department. The new names were to reflect the actual and future content of the task of these authorities, and to correspond better with the concepts used in the EU (EMN 2009, 8). Thus, my conclusion is that this administrative reform was largely influenced by the structure of asylum governance in other EU member states.¹

As part of the major reform, the overall coordination of responsibility for the reception centres was transferred from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of the Interior in 2008. At that time, there were 11 reception centres; two of them were managed by the State, six by the local municipalities and three by the Finnish Red Cross. Even though on the national level the reception centres were under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, on the local level their functions continued to be supervised and funded by the regional centres of Employment and Economic Development for some years (EMN 2009, 9). A further development in 2008 was that a government proposal was made to transfer the supervision of the reception centres in its totality to the Finnish Immigration Service. This was one of the suggestions made in the above-mentioned report commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior (Norrback 2008).² The Ministry of the Interior also had a working group in 2018-2009, which aimed at

¹ Yet, the example of other EU member states needs to be seen as providing an indirect influence on the administrative system. The EU does not directly decide or demand administrative changes. As an interviewee explained “The trigger or the initiative for these changes does not come from the EU or EU law. EU law provides some flexibility how to organise reception and does not interfere with the system of national administration” (WP3_UH_E011_P).

² Even though the reception centres formally were placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, on the local level their functions remained supervised by the Ministry of Employment and Economic Development. A further development in this area in 2008 and 2009 was a Government Bill to transfer the supervision of the reception centres in its totality to the Finnish Immigration Service, to create a more

a further structural development of the migration administration in the Ministry, which would promote the migration policy of the Government Programme (Government of Finland 2007) and plan the implementation of the proposals in the above-mentioned report (EMN 2010, 8).

At the regional level, significant general institutional developments had been planned for some time and were completed in 2009 when the Regional State Administration Reform (ALKU) phased out all state provincial offices, employment and economic centres, regional environmental centres, environmental permit agencies, road districts and occupational health and safety districts. Their tasks were reorganised into two new regional state administrative bodies: The Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI) and the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and Environment (ELY Centres). Initially, the ELY centres played the role as the regional state agency that oversaw the running of reception centres. The administrative structure of the Police was also reformed in 2009. At the first phase the number of police districts was reduced from 90 to 24 (EMN 2010, 4-5).

In 2009, the Government started to draft a new act for the reception of asylum seekers. The reception of asylum seekers was at that time enacted in the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999). The position of the government was that it was not appropriate to enact integration and reception in the same act. Hence, a new act on the reception of asylum seekers was prepared (EMN 2010).

The New Integration and Reception Acts

In general, consecutive Finnish governments have supported the development of a Common European Asylum System (Wahlbeck 2019). One early source of information are the responses in 2007 to the questions posed in the Commission's Green Paper on the future CEAS (Ministry of the Interior 2007). In this document, Finland supported and aims to actively promote the CEAS. Finland also aimed at a CEAS where "the reception conditions are sufficiently uniform; the beneficiaries of international protection and other persons are integrated in the same manner that is as uniform as possible, and the rights granted and services provided to them are mainly in line with the rights granted and services provided to other residents of the country" (Ministry of the Interior 2007). Noteworthy in the reply in 2007 is the emphasis on *resettlement*, which probably reflects the country's long history of resettlement of quota refugees and a general wish to control immigration (cf. Wahlbeck 2019). The focus on equal services can be seen as a reflection of the Nordic welfare state system of Finland, which is based on a universal provision of services by the state. This emphasis on a uniform provision of services is later repeated in the reply, in the context of legal measures to enhance integration: "Integration must be realised as uniformly as possible between persons belonging to different categories of protection. The rights granted and services provided must generally be similar to the rights granted and services provided to the residents of the country" (Ministry of the Interior 2007).

transparent and unified system under one Ministry. The Government Bill 78/2009 was given to the Parliament in May 2009. According to the EMN annual report, this development aimed to ensure "a more unified quality for the treatment of customers" (EMN 2010, 12). This was one of the suggestions made in the report (Norrback 2008) by the Ministry of the Interior on the development of migration administration. From 2010 onwards, the steering of reception centres as well as the accommodation of asylum seekers was the Finnish Immigration Service's responsibility, and this administrative change required amendments of the Act on the Finnish Immigration Service (156/1995)³², Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999)³³ and the Act on the Treatment of Aliens Taken into Detention and on the Detention Unit (EMN 2010, 12).

During 2009, several law amendments were planned to implement EU-legislation into national law. The Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC was transposed into the Aliens Act on 9 June 2009. The scope of granting subsidiary protection was narrowed to meet the definition of subsidiary protection in the Directive. At the same time, a new, third protection category (humanitarian protection) was introduced to retain the level of protection granted in Finland (EMN 2010, 5). The reform of the Integration Act involved separate laws on the integration of immigrants and on the reception of persons seeking international protection. On 15 October 2010, the Government submitted a Bill to Parliament for the new Integration Act. Simultaneously with this reform of the Integration Act, a Government Bill on the Reception Act was prepared, although actual content in the provisions on the reception was not planned to be significantly changed (EMN 2011, 13, 30). The content of these two new laws are described below.

The new Act on Promotion of Integration of Immigrants (1386/2010) came fully into force on 1 September 2011 ("Integration Act").³ The Act aims to support and promote integration and participation in the Finnish society and to promote equality. Under the new Act, integration measures were extended to cover all immigrants. Individual integration plans for each arriving immigrant were to be done by the municipalities and the ELY centres. The services available for promoting the integration of immigrants in the early stage of the integration were also regulated in the law, as well as the general goals of the local level and the integration programmes of the state. The law also contains regulations of the state compensation to the municipalities concerning costs of the resettlement of refugees (EMN 2012, 39).

The new Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings ("Reception Act") (746/2011) came into force on 1st September 2011. The Act aims to ensure support and care for both asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection in the context of a mass influx. Furthermore, the purpose of the Act is to assist victims of trafficking in human beings. Services included in the reception services are accommodation, social assistance, social services, healthcare services, interpretation services, work and study activities and economic assistance. Accommodation shall be organised so that families can stay together. Special needs due to the age, vulnerability and physical and mental condition of asylum seekers shall be taken into account in organising accommodation and in arranging their reception in general. The best interests of children shall be taken into account in reception. The Finnish Immigration Service is according to the Act responsible for the practical coordination, planning and monitoring of the reception of asylum seekers.

In the new Reception Act, the different types of reception facilities are explicitly laid out. The law does not make any distinction between the different types of centres concerning the right to reception services. According to the law there are both transit centres (*kauttakulkukeskus*) for application processes and initial short-time stay, and reception centres (*vastaanottokeskus*) for the provision of services. This distinction mainly codified an already existing division of work among reception centres, some centres had always been more suitable for a long-term stay than others. Transit and reception centres may also exist in the same premises. The law also mentions the family homes and

³ In addition to the new Integration Act, the Nationality Act was also amended in 2011, and the promotion of immigrant integration was also in this case one of the objectives mentioned by the Government. The duration of residence required for obtaining Finnish nationality was changed from six years to five (EMN 2012, 7). The required duration had initially been extended from five to six years when the Nationality Act was changed in 2003, as part of a political compromise allowing Finnish citizens to hold multiple citizenship (Wahlbeck 2008).

accommodation arrangements for unaccompanied minors, which from the legal point of view are also “reception centres”. The new Reception Act also outlines a third type of reception unit, “registration centres” (*järjestelykeskus*), which are centres for short term accommodation that could be established for registration purposes in cases of mass influx. The special circumstances under which registration centres can be established are mentioned in the Aliens Act 133 §, according to which registration centres only can be established by the government for a fixed period not exceeding three months. These registration centres had never existed in Finland before the first and only one was operational in Tornio for a few months in 2015-2016 (a case that will be described later in this report).

According to the law, the Ministry of the Interior decides on the opening of centres. In practice, the Finnish Immigration Service asks the Ministry of the Interior for formal permission to open new centres, since the funding comes from the state budget. The Finnish Immigration Service also negotiates and formally agrees the running of new centres with the operator in question, a process that may take several months. The Reception Act includes relatively detailed description of the expenses of the operator that the state will cover. In practice, the Finnish Red Cross has been a key operator, the organisation has a long history and experience of cooperation with the state in reception activities, and the organisation has an existing agreement with the Finnish Immigration Service for emergencies, and a preparedness to rapidly open new centres.

In the new Reception Act, the amount of the economic support for asylum seekers became smaller and clearly separated from the general social assistance provided to all people living in permanently in Finland (Until 2017 paid by the municipalities and subsequently paid by national Social Insurance Institution (KELA)). The allowance paid to asylum seekers is a separate *reception allowance*, which depends on if the reception centres provides food or not. Children, co-habiting adults and single adults get a different amount. The accommodation provided by the reception centre is free of charge and includes health services. The Reception Act explicitly stipulates that the rights of children as outlined in the Child Welfare Act (417/2007) had to be followed in the case of asylum seekers. This is significant in the case of service provisions, since what follows is that under-age asylum seekers have the right to the same services as residents of Finland.

In the case of adult asylum seekers, the health services cover basic health care and are not as comprehensive as the public health services provided to all residents in Finland (Kiuru 2014). According to the Reception Act, the health services are given in accordance with the Finnish Health Care Act (1326/2010) 50 §:

Urgent medical care, including urgent oral health care, mental health care, substance abuse care, and psychosocial support shall be provided for patients regardless of their place of residence. Urgent cases include cases involving an injury, a sudden onset of an illness, an exacerbation of a long-term illness, or a deterioration of functional ability where immediate intervention is required and where treatment cannot be postponed without risking the worsening of the condition or further injury (Finnish Health Care Act (1326/2010), 50§).

Furthermore, urgent special health care is given in accordance with the Specialised Health Care Act (1062/1989) 3 § and, according to the Integration Act, health care for asylum seekers can also include other health care deemed necessary by a health care professional. In the case of children, health care services are to be given to the same extent as to persons who are permanent residents of Finland.

Administrative Issues before 2015

After the above-mentioned major formal reorganisation of state administration and legal revisions of that took place in early 2000s, no major changes in laws or governance of asylum took place before the year 2015. Instead, state administration seemed to focus on its own efficiency, a further centralisation and cost-saving measures in the years 2010-2015, which largely coincides with the period of the broad coalition Katainen Government in 2011-2014. In general, this government continued the same migration and asylum policies as previous governments, and “supports the goal, included in the Stockholm Programme, to develop a Common European Asylum System” (Government of Finland 2011, 27)

According to the EMN annual report, the Finnish Immigration Service developed its services, for example by the development and adoption of electronic case management systems and means of communication (EMN 2011, 6). In 2011, as part of the national implementation of European Council Regulation 380/2008 on biometric identifiers, a Government proposal was submitted on the adoption of biometric identifiers on residence permits. These biometric residence permit cards became introduced on 1 January 2012 (EMN 2012, 7). In 2011, The Aliens Act was amended with new provisions concerning forensic testing to determine the age asylum seekers who are unaccompanied minors. Previously, the authorities did not have the legal right to use forensic testing to determine the age of asylum seekers who are unaccompanied minors (EMN 2011, 6).

One of the objectives for the Katainen Government Programme (2011-2014) was expediting the processing of asylum applications (Government of Finland 2011). In the Ministry of the Interior, the work to improve the effectiveness of the administration of immigration affairs were monitored in a plan set up for 2011–2014. The costs of the asylum seekers’ reception system were intended to be adjusted to the number of asylum seekers and the shortened processing times of asylum applications (EMN 2013). The Ministry of the Interior also tried to determine what factors slow down decision-making and aimed to have returns on the basis of negative asylum decisions enforced faster than previously. The Ministry is reported to have put a particular emphasis on improving the co-operation between the authorities concerned as well as the steering of reception centres and integrating their operations more closely with those of the Finnish Immigration Service. The Ministry also sought ways to improve the efficiency of transferring asylum seekers who have been granted a residence permit from reception centres to municipalities (EMN 2012, 2013). Despite the aim of accelerating processing, the Ministry stated that “the quality of decision-making on asylum applications should be maintained at least at the current level” (EMN 2012, 20). The aim was also to improve the efficiency of the operations of immigration authorities to achieve a €20 million in cost savings required by the government’s expenditure framework and an estimated €17 million in further cost savings resulting from a decline in the number of applicants, both by 2015 (EMN 2012, 20). This government plan for cost saving I find noteworthy, since it is not known how this decline in numbers of *applicants* was supposed to be secured.

The Katainen Government also decided that immigrant *integration* affairs would be transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Employment and the Economy at the beginning of the year 2012. This is the first move of tasks away from the Ministry of Interior in many years. Asylum reception and refugee integration issues became even more detached from each other since they now became clearly led by different ministries. Under the new legislation, integration policy tasks and the staff responsible for them were transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, and more specifically to its Employment and Entrepreneurship Department. The Ministry of the Interior continued to be responsible for immigration, international

protection and return migration affairs in Finland. The transfer of integration affairs from one administrative sector to another was based on the aims in the Government Programme to improve the integration and employment of immigrants on the open labour market. With the transfer, the government wished to ensure that the employment and economic development administration would be better equipped to gear its services towards the promotion of integration and employment of immigrants (EMN 2012, 20; Government of Finland 2011).

In line with the Katainen Government Programme, the Police were also trying to accelerate the execution of the removal of persons after the refusal of asylum (EMN 2014, 66). In 2012, the effectiveness was improved, for instance, by reorganising the tasks of the Finnish Immigration Service and especially the stages of the asylum process (EMN 2013, 106). Significant savings were reported to have been achieved in the immigration administration in 2012 by bringing the reception network of asylum seekers into line with the decline in the number of asylum seekers (EMN 2013, 115).

In 2014, preparations began regarding the transfer to the Finnish Immigration Service of certain tasks assigned to the Police. In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior prepared a proposal on the transfer of tasks from the Police to the Finnish Immigration Service, including issuing residence permit extensions and permanent residence permits, as well as the registration of EU citizens. Also transferred would be some of the tasks in the early stages of the asylum process, which were the responsibility of the Police and the Finnish Border Guard. Previously, the initial interviews were usually made by the local police, and subsequent interviews usually made by the Finnish Immigration Service in Helsinki. According to the Ministry of the Interior, a concentration of all interviews to the Finnish Immigration Service and its few local offices would lead to savings in resources (EMN 2015, 44). In any case, the government, and especially the Ministry of the Interior, increasingly aimed to concentrate the asylum procedure to the Finnish Immigration Service in the mid-2010s. The main driving force for the administrative changes in this period seems to have been the aim to save costs.

The Role of NGOs and Human Rights Concerns

The government programmes and the EMN annual reports do not provide much information on the activities of NGOs. This information has mainly been compiled by the author from other reports and from the interviews with key experts. A specific feature of both the asylum reception system and the refugee integration in Finland is the large involvement of the Finnish Red Cross, its regional districts and the volunteers of its local branches. Right from the beginning of the arrival of the first quote refugees in the 1980s, the Finnish Red Cross and its local branches have supported both state and local authorities with many key tasks (e.g. Wahlbeck 1992). The local volunteers have supported refugees during their arrival in municipalities and the organisation has an extensive knowledge and experience in resettlement and integration issues. This involvement in refugee issues became even more pronounced when the Finnish Red Cross found themselves running a large part of the asylum reception centres already in the 1990s. This important involvement in refugee issues, however, finds its explanation in the humanitarian tasks of the organisation. The support and services provided by the Finnish Red Cross also has a legal foundation in the tasks listed in the Act on the Finnish Red Cross (238/2000). The Finnish Red Cross provides the government with a reliable partner in the tasks that otherwise may be difficult to find the right expertise and equipment for, and the nature of the organisation of the Finnish Red Cross also makes it possible to rapidly scale the services according to the needs that arise. The running of the Finnish Red Cross reception centres is today regulated and financed by agreement (*puitesopimus*) between The Finnish Red Cross and the Finnish Immigration Service, which outlines the division of labour and the preparedness for emergency situations, including

the number of places in reception centres that the organisation is prepared to offer with short notice. According to my interviews, these plans of the Finnish Red Cross included 4000 extra places in 2015, “which rapidly had to be increased” (WP3_UH_E023_P). The Finnish Red Cross is one of the largest NGOs in Finland, organised into professional regional districts as well as hundreds of local branches with volunteers all over the country. The number of individual members is about 80 000 and the active volunteers are about 40 000. Thus, the organisation can rapidly find volunteers that can provide support in both reception centres and in the resettlement of refugees in any municipality in Finland (cf. SPR 2016). Clearly, the voluntary work of the Finnish Red Cross was of key importance in the reception of a record number of asylum seekers in the autumn of 2015. As a local worker in one of the Red Cross districts remembered the situation in the autumn of 2015:

Well, I would say that the month of September 2015 was quite an emergency drill. We really tested if our plans for emergency situations were up to the task. We had the numbers we needed to accommodate on paper, but I was worried how things would work in practice. The shortage of time was the main challenge. Luckily, we did get support everywhere, both our local branches [volunteers] and other [NGO] organisations, and we received weekly updates from the central [Red Cross] office in Helsinki about how things proceeded nationally (WP3_UH_E023_P).

The Finnish Red Cross is the key organisation in reception activities, and due to its nature the organisation is not visibly active in politics. However, there are other interest organisations that actively and very visibly try to influence policies, these include a variety of organisations working for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, but also other interest organisations and human rights organisations. For example, an expert in an NGO told me:

I am almost daily in contact with colleagues and other sections [of the NGO]. There are also plenty of national networks. There are different national networks, both formal and informal, for refugee issues and for the rights of paperless persons, for example. (WP2_UH_E008_P).

There are some concrete indications that some NGOs and human rights organisations may be able to influence policymaking in Finland. The EMN (2011, 2012) annual reports states that, in line with the goals of the Government Programme, the Ministry of the Interior examined the legal provisions concerning detention. Detention is not related to the asylum system, but it was controversial that detention potentially may be used in the case of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (cf. Björklund 2015). The plans to change this was part of the new Government Programme of Prime Minister Katainen (Government of Finland 2011), which aimed to prohibit the detention of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and develop other alternatives for detention. According to EMN, “Organisations monitoring human rights had highlighted these issues in their recommendations and statements” (EMN 2012, 46-47). This exemplifies how international organisations and well-organised NGOs occasionally can be significant actors in the development of legislation and policies in Finland.⁴

⁴ Detention practices have received plenty of attention and the government has prepared changes in legislation and practices for a long time. For example, because of the long distances in Finland, Finland occasionally has used police and border guard stations for detention, a practice that has been criticised by international human rights organisations (Global Detention Project 2018). In 2014, the government established a new detention unit in Lappeenranta with capacity for 30 persons in connection with the Joutseno reception centre. Together with the old detention centre in Helsinki, which at this time was run by the city of Helsinki, the total capacity in Finland increased to 70 places (EMN 2014, 53). The legislative amendments related to detention entered into force on 1 July 2015. The Aliens Act was amended so that the detention of asylum-seeking unaccompanied children was prohibited and regulation pertaining to the detention of a child was further specified. An unaccompanied minor under 15 years of age was not be detained even after the decision of his/her removal had become enforceable. In addition, the

The situation of unaccompanied minors was discussed in public debates in the early 2010s. In 2012, several NGOs expressed their concern regarding the reception, placement and legal protection of minor asylum seekers, among other things. The Finnish Central Union of Child Welfare have issued statements on, for example, the improvement of the reception and representation system of unaccompanied children (cf. Lepola 2012). UNICEF Finland was concerned that the system of assistance for minor victims of trafficking was too separate from national child welfare. The number of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers had started to grow in 2008 when their number grew from 165 in 2007 to 706 in 2008. In 2009, 557 applications were submitted and their number continued to fall. In 2010, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers submitted 329 applications and only 150 in 2011 (EMN 2011, 2012). As will be mentioned below, this decrease in the number was only temporary and a record number of 3024 unaccompanied minors submitted applications in 2015.

Another human rights issue that has received attention is the assistance provided to victims of human trafficking, which is governed by both the Reception Act and the Integration Act. In practice, the system for assisting victims of human trafficking is linked to the asylum seekers' reception system. In the early 2010s, Joutseno reception centre was the competent reception centre in assisting adults, groups and families. Oulu reception centre was responsible for assisting underage victims of human trafficking (EMN 2012, 47). This exemplifies that although expertise and professional staff were available in the reception system, the system was planned for a small number of applicants only.

2. Recent Processes of Reconfiguration of the Governance of the Reception System

2.1. Process of Decision-Making and the So-Called Crisis of 2015

As the previous chapter has provided examples of, the process of decision-making in Finland has been a process where the government, or more precisely the Ministry of the Interior, has prepared and initiated legal changes, which have become part of the legal framework that guides the reception system. This top-down decision-making has been the major driving force behind the recent reconfiguration of the reception system. Yet, there are also various other actors that implement the decisions and may influence the system in practice. Especially the rapid changes during the arrival of an unprecedented large number of asylum seekers in 2015 provided an arena for new actors and new developments.

And the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. It changed everything at once. In all respects. If people did not know from before what an asylum seeker is, in 2015 everybody in Finland knew. It changed a lot. It still influences. Many new actors became involved. Some have already left, but many new ones came in 2015. This difficult situation in 2015, which we eventually managed quite well, it did influence in the way that the issue [of asylum] became known in Finland. (WP_UH_E013_P)

As the above quotation from a civil servant in Finland exemplifies, the interviewees mention the major influx of asylum seekers in 2015 as a decisive turning point in the reception discourses in Finland. Yet, it was not necessarily a trigger of change of the national reception system. As outlined previously in this report, major changes in laws and governance had been initiated already much earlier than 2015. Yet, the developments in 2015 seems to have speeded up the ongoing processes of change. The recent processes of reconfiguration of the governance of the reception system also include some new legal

detention of older unaccompanied minors for the purpose of ensuring removal was restricted. The detention of minors on police premises became prohibited (EMN 2016, 48).

changes. These include the changes because of the recast CEAS, which had been planned for some time. However, the increase in migration flows in 2015 did also bring about some brand new changes, mainly various new restrictive policies that aimed to limit the number of asylum seekers. In the following I will discuss these legal and administrative changes.

The Role of the Recast CEAS and Other EU Legislation

In 2012, The Ministry of the Interior started to prepare legislative changes concerning the CEAS. The aim of the changes was to harmonise Finnish legislation with the recast CEAS directives and regulations. The work in the Ministry took from January 2013 to May 2015 and looked into the type of amendments required to the Aliens Act by the recast Qualification Directive, the Procedures Directive as well as Dublin and Eurodac regulations. The recast Reception Directive was another focus at the Ministry, mainly affecting the Reception Act in Finland (EMN 2013, 2014).

A government proposal amending the Finnish Aliens Act because of the EU Qualification Directive was given to Parliament in March 2014. The proposal was passed and entered into force on 1 July 2014. The Qualification Directive resulted in only minor changes to Finnish legislation and practices (EMN 2015, 34). The amendments primarily related to clarifying concepts in the Aliens Act and codifying existing implementation practices as law (EMN 2014, 70).⁵

In 2014, the Ministry of the Interior also prepared legislative amendments for the implementation of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive and Reception Conditions Directive. The legislative amendments concerned the Aliens Act and the Reception Act. According to the EMN report, “the basic characteristics of the Finnish asylum and reception system were already in line with the requirements stipulated by the directives to begin with. Nevertheless, amendments were made to the Aliens Act to improve the clarity and transparency of the asylum system and promote the equal treatment of applicants for international protection” (EMN 2015, 34; cf. EMN 2016, 33). The amendments to the Reception Act specified the assessment of the special needs of vulnerable persons, accommodation issues, and the provisions concerning the representative of an unaccompanied minor. The amendments to the Aliens Act were confirmed by the Parliament on 6 March 2015 and the amendments to the Reception Act were confirmed on 6 February 2015. Both the recast Asylum Procedures Directive and Reception Conditions Directive came into force on 1 July 2015, and with these amendments Finnish legislation became harmonised with the directives (EMN 2014, 34).

There are also indications that not only laws, but also the Finnish decision practices have been influenced by harmonisation developments, although this may be difficult to establish with certainty. For example, the proportion of positive decisions based on Convention Refugee Status increased in the early 2000s, while the proportion of positive decisions based on subsidiary protection has decreased in the same period. This can, of course, be interpreted as either a development towards more restrictive policies or towards less restrictive policies. However, the Head of the Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise at the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), François Bienfait has claimed that since Finland started to train their staff with the EASO training module, this has produced “a situation much more in line with the prescriptions of the International and European Refugee Law” (EMN 2013, 12). In a comparative study of asylum recognition rates in the EU member states in 2014,

⁵ It was necessary to clarify the provisions in the Aliens Act concerning the reasons for persecution, offering protection, the possibility of internal protection and the withdrawal of refugee status and subsidiary protection status. In addition, the legislative amendment strengthened efforts to reconnect unaccompanied minors with their parents or guardians residing outside Finland (EMN 2014, 34).

Finland did not deviate much from the average recognition rates, taking into account the nationality, age and sex of the applicants (although a high recognition rate of Ukrainian asylum seekers is mentioned in the study) (Leerkes 2015, 17).

The Impact of the So-Called Crisis in 2015

In the early 2010s, the number of asylum seekers was between 3000 and 4000 applicants (see Figure 1). In 2010, the total number was 3088. The EMN annual report states that, in response to the general decline in the number of asylum seekers, the Finnish Immigration Service cut the accommodation capacity of reception centres by approximately 550 beds in 2011 (EMN 2012). Some preparations for an increase in the number of applicants is also mentioned:

The reception unit of the Finnish Immigration Service, which is in charge of the reception of asylum seekers, closely monitors the number and profiles of applicants in Finland and the other Nordic countries. The unit also keeps a close eye on societal development in Northern Africa and its potential impacts on the number of refugees leaving the area and eventually entering Finland. If necessary, the accommodation capacity of reception centres can be rapidly increased. For instance, the Oulu reception centre maintains the ability to increase the accommodation capacity for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in response to demand (EMN 2012, 66).

Of course, in hindsight, it is easy to conclude that these preparations turned out to be insufficient for the actual number of asylum seekers that arrived four years later. According to expert interviews made for this research project, at various meetings there had, for example, been discussions of emergency plans for the “highly unlikely” scenario of 10 000 asylum seekers. As a civil servant expressed it “I remember that we all kind of laughed about the high number presented, since we all thought the number was highly unlikely” (WP3_UH_E013_P). The emergency plans in 2013 apparently included relatively vague plans for an extension of all existing reception centres to 10 000 places, emergency accommodation for an additional 10 000 asylum seekers, which would be coordinated by the Finnish Red Cross, and up to 80 000 additional arrivals would be considered a mass influx coordinated by the state regional authorities. Practical guidance to handle these particular scenarios were communicated by the Finnish Red Cross to its volunteers (SPR 2013).

In 2013, there were approximately 3536 asylum seekers on record in the reception system, of whom 95 had entered the country as unaccompanied minors. Of the applicants, 2570 lived in reception centres, while approximately 966 lived in private accommodation. Private accommodation refers to the asylum seeker being accommodated at a friend’s or relative’s home instead of a reception centre (EMN 2014, 67). As the increase in the number of asylum seekers was minor in 2013, and the rate of asylum seekers moving out of the sphere of reception operations was higher than before, several reception centres reduced their capacity and the decision was made to discontinue two reception centres entirely in 2013. The total accommodation capacity of reception centres in Finland was about 2,800 by the beginning of 2014. According to the EMN Annual Report of 2013, the Finnish Immigration Service monitored the accommodation capacity of reception centres in relation to new asylum seekers in real time. The utilisation rate of the centre accommodation capacity was kept as high as possible (90 percent) in order to avoid underutilisation (EMN 2014, 67). A high utilisation rate requires that the centres are capable of increasing their accommodation capacity if necessary. In 2013, when the total number of applicants was low, the strategic aim of reception activities was according to the EMN report, “to change the operational concept of reception centres where applicants are accommodated for the duration of the processing from institutionalised activities to decentralised flat-based activities.

In a flat-based reception unit, accommodation facilities are located in regular apartments in different parts of the municipality where the centre is located, in which case the accommodation capacity can be flexibly adjusted by renting new flats or by terminating tenancy agreements usually with a month's notice as necessary" (EMN 2014, 68). This operational model was reported to generate significant cost savings when compared to an institutional unit where the accommodation capacity is tied to large real estate properties in which renting expenses constitute a significant portion of the unit's fixed costs (EMN 2014, 67-68). Thus, cost savings seems to continue to influence developments in 2013.

In 2014, the increase in the number of asylum seekers continued to be very moderate in Finland compared to the situation in many other EU Member States, where an increase already was evident. In Finland, the increase in the number of asylum seekers did not happen before the summer of 2015. The sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers began in July 2015 and in the peak month of September 2015 there were nearly 11 000 new asylum seekers (EMN 2016). In 2015, a total of 32 476 persons applied for asylum in Finland. Although this number is much smaller than many other European countries, the almost 10-fold increase in the number of asylum seekers was the highest proportional change in Europe. The increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to Finland reflects the situation in neighboring Sweden that received about 163 000 asylum seekers the same year. A particular feature of the arrivals in both Sweden and Finland was the high number of unaccompanied minors. In Finland, the total number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors was 3024, more than 15-fold the number of the previous year. Of these, 94 percent were boys and 6 percent were girls (EMN 2016, 47). In 2014 and 2015, the largest national groups among the asylum seekers were Iraqi citizens. In 2015, the largest groups were Iraq (63 %), Afghanistan (16 %), Somalia (6 %), Syria (2,7 %), Albania (2,3 %) and Iran (1,9 %).

In August 2015, it became clear that urgent measures were required to increase the reception capacity quickly. In this acute situation, it was also necessary to resort to various emergency accommodation solutions (EMN 2016). The role of the Finnish Red Cross in managing the situation was crucial since it had access to more than 30 000 volunteers. The Finnish Red Cross opened up 104 new reception centres mainly for adults, and the Finnish Red Cross also found various types of emergency accommodation for adults, including tents (SPR 2016). In the case of the Finnish Red Cross, the administrative process to expand existing centres and open new ones could be rapidly agreed with the Finnish Immigration Service, since there already existed an agreement that the Finnish Red Cross should find up to 10 000 emergency accommodation places if needed. A large number of NGOs, religious congregations, municipalities and private companies and individuals offered spaces for accommodation to the Finnish Red Cross, or directly to the Finnish Immigration Service.

Yet, the reception facilities found by the Finnish Red Cross was not enough and the Finnish Immigration Service rapidly had to find new operators to run reception centres. These new operators included both NGOs and private companies. Especially in the case of unaccompanied minors, a variety of new NGOs and public service providers in the health and social sector were found that were able to open new reception units for minors. Private companies in the social and health sector were now for the first time opening reception centres. According to my interviews, about 60 different actors had contracts to run reception centres in early 2016 (WP3_UH_E013_P). A civil servant at a state agency involved in the opening of new centres explained how things worked in practice:

The work in practice was that all possible actors were contacted and asked if they could open up reception centres. Some firms and organisations did make contacts with Migri themselves, but Migri had to act very rapidly to find new places. All possible stones were turned and we

explained the national situations to the actors we contacted. And of course, also the government and the media highlighted the issue and the Prime Minister made a speech declaring that this was the biggest national challenge at the moment, this did help and all actors understood the situation and were ready to be flexible. [...] You had to make the contracts much faster than previously. When it usually would take three months to start a centre this now had to be done in a few weeks or a few days. You needed to get the centres going in about three weeks time. For example, who can recruit staff within a few days? Everybody really had to be flexible. [...] Basically, when you came to work in the morning you knew that during the morning you personally need to find two or three new reception centres before noon. The fastest establishment I was involved in was a centre opened in two days, which exemplifies the situation. [...] The numbers were so high; there was no time to negotiate contracts and find the best solutions, and certainly errors were made. Some centres were perhaps not the most suitable, but the decisions had to be done very rapidly, and the facilities had not been checked in advance in the way it would normally have been done. [...] In the end, it all relied on a few key persons, the decisions on new places were made by a few persons [mentions the names of four civil servants], and things had to be done rapidly [...] And also the Finnish Red Cross really had to stretch to make things work. It helped that they have the regional organisations and volunteers that can help. They really did a big job during autumn 2015. (WP3_UH_E013_P)

An obvious change in reception practices in 2015 was the emergence of commercial companies running centres, which would seem to be a big change in principle. Yet, according to the interviewed experts in this study, this did not constitute a major change in practice. Private companies selling their services have dominated the service provision in most other areas of the public social and health sector in Finland, and it was therefore not considered a major change that these companies also would run reception centres. The companies had experience of operations in the public sector and could easily sign the same type of contracts that already existed with the Finnish Red Cross. A big challenge was, however, the speed required to open up new centres. While the negotiations between the Finnish Immigration Service and the operator previously had taken a couple of months, new contracts had to be signed in a few days or weeks in the autumn of 2015 (WP3_UH_E011_P; WP3_UH_E013_P). The Finnish Immigration Service was helped by the EU decision (9.9.2015 COM(2015) 454 final) that contracts for the opening of new reception centres did not have to follow normal public procurement rules (European Commission 2015). The lawfulness of the practice to not compete the opening of reception centres under these special circumstances was later confirmed by a decision on a complaint made to The Chancellor of Justice, which established that the opening of reception centres by Finnish authorities had followed Finnish law in the early autumn of 2015 (Chancellor of Justice 2016).

On 4 September 2015, the Ministry of the Interior established an expert group with representatives of key ministries and state authorities, to manage the acute situation and to launch required measures at all levels throughout the state administration (EMN 2016, 39). The Finnish Immigration Service was given a fixed-term mandate to establish necessary reception and registration centres without a formal approval being made by the Ministry of the Interior for each new centre (EMN 2016, 45). The Finnish Immigration Service established a coordination centre for the daily work to handle the acute situation. This centre guided practical reception-related accommodation operations and coordinated the assignment of asylum seekers to different reception centres (EMN 2016, 45). The Finnish Red Cross also operated its own national centre to coordinated its activities (WP3_UH_E017_P).

Due to the significant increase in the number of asylum applications, the number of asylum application case workers at the Finnish Immigration Service was rapidly increased. The Finnish Immigration Service recruited more than 200 new employees in 2015 and two new regional offices (Turku, Rovaniemi) were established (EMN 2016, 39). In November 2015, the Police and the Finnish Immigration Service adopted an operating model in which only one of these two authorities conducted the asylum interviews, and both the initial hearing and the asylum interview were carried out at the same time, and gradually all interviews were moved from the Police to the Finnish immigration Service in March 2016 (EMN 2016, 39-40). How these rapid and major changes in the asylum application process have influenced the standard of the asylum decisions has been the focus of much critical debate, public protests and official evaluations in the years to follow (cf. Chancellor of Justice 2017; Saarikkomäki et al. 2018).

In 2015, a new development in Finland was that most asylum seekers arrived in the northern part of Finland, arriving from Sweden at the Finnish border town of Tornio (Torneå), next to the Swedish town of Haparanda. Since both the ferry and flight companies demanded travel documents, the land border in northern Finland was the only possible access point for many asylum seekers. On 17 September 2015, the Government decided to set up a temporary *registration centre* in Tornio, which remained operational until March 2016. To establish a registration centre was an administrative solution to handle the initial admission of asylum seekers, to respond to the unprecedented large number of applicants arriving across the border from Sweden. It involved the cooperation between many state and local authorities, including logistical help from the army. The explicit aim of the centre was to have all asylum seekers registered in a controlled manner (cf. Wahlbeck 2019). Asylum seekers were obliged to stay at the centre during the registration, thus restricting their movement, unless they could not stay there because of their state of health or for other personal reasons. No decisions on refusing entry were made at the registration centre; asylum seekers were only registered, and their applications lodged there. The possibility to open registration centres is outlined in the Reception Act (12§) and in the Aliens Act (133§), but such a centre had never before been established in Finland. After registration in the centre, asylum applicants were transferred to regular reception centres. Under the law, asylum seekers may stay at the registration centre for a maximum of 2–7 days. Thus, the registration centre provided temporary shelter for asylum seekers and helped the authorities to clear the backlog (EMN 2015, 2016). This eased the workload at the local police stations that previously had taken care of registration. The sudden arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers had created demanding humanitarian situations outside the local police stations across the country, including children and elderly people spending long time in queues without clothes suitable for the Finnish climate and only relying on support from Finnish volunteers (cf. Mäenpää 2015).

The EMN annual report of 2015 describes the challenges of the reception system in September 2015: “The substantial and extremely fast increase of the reception capacity, along with the significantly higher number of applicants, has proved to be challenging, which has partly been reflected on reception conditions. In early autumn, it was necessary to resort to various emergency accommodation facilities, such as church crypts, sports halls, tents and containers, to accommodate asylum seekers” (EMN 2016, 45). Furthermore, the EMN annual report states that “the establishment of new reception centres was slowed down by the long municipal approval process that could result in the municipality prohibiting the establishment of a reception centre or an emergency accommodation unit in its territory. When the need for new reception centres became extremely acute in September, the Finnish Immigration Service decided to cease consulting local authorities concerning the establishment of reception centres if a reception centre or an emergency accommodation unit is to be located in

facilities rented from private owners or if it is to be maintained by the Finnish Red Cross or another third party” (EMN 2016, 45). Actually, the practice to consult the municipality was not based on any formal requirement or any law and could therefore be dropped. Yet, this change can be interpreted as a relatively major change of practice in the cooperation with the municipalities.

Another complicated issue in the share of responsibility between state and municipalities emerged when the Ministry of the Interior wanted to clarify the role of municipalities in the previously unused legal framework concerning the establishment of registration centres in situations of mass influx (or measures for temporary protection in cases of massive displacement), which are mentioned in the Reception Act 12§ and Aliens Act 109§ and 133§. In situations of mass influx, the concerned municipalities are according to law obliged to agree with the state on reception activities. The Chancellor of Justice was asked for an interpretation of the law, and found that municipal autonomy was guaranteed by the Constitution of Finland, which prevents the state from making it compulsory for municipalities to sign contracts on resettlement of refugees or to force municipalities to run reception centres. Still, it is also clear that the municipalities have no legal way of preventing an opening of a reception or registration centre (WP3_UH_E012_P). In the end, the issue did not have practical consequences, but as far as I understand this still remains an unresolved legal detail.

From the perspective of the municipalities, it was not a satisfactory solution that they were no longer consulted on the opening of reception centres. The Association of Local and Regional Authorities, representing the municipalities, published a report in 2016, which strongly stressed the importance of consulting the municipality:

The Association of Local and Regional Authorities finds it very important that the Finnish Immigration Service informs the municipality about the opening of a reception centre within the area of the municipality. It is desirable that the municipality should have a possibility to express its opinion on the opening of a reception centre within the area of the municipality, if given the circumstances, it is in any way possible. Special attention has to be given to the provision of information to the residents of the municipality (Association of ... 2016b, 10; translation from Finnish by author)

In the interviews made for this study, it was emphasised in various ways that the local community should have a better possibility to influence where and how reception centres are opened (e.g. WP3_UH_E021_P; WP3_UH_E022_P). In the demanding period of the autumn of 2015, the opening of new centres did not always go smoothly, as will be described in the two local cases presented below. There were also completely new operators running new reception centres “and employees include professionals that do not necessarily have previous experience working with asylum seekers” (EMN 2016, 45). New reception centres and emergency accommodation facilities were established on short notice “in municipalities with no previous experience of reception centres in their locality, which has, in some cases, caused concern in the neighbourhood. Criminal offences, such as vandalism and even attempted arson, have also been committed against reception centres and facilities with planned use as reception centres” (EMN 2016, 45). There were numerous local demonstrations both for and against new reception centres all over the country. Cases where asylum seekers have been suspected of criminal offences have also made the news, which led to the forming of unofficial street patrols in some parts of the country (EMN 2016, 45). The ways to tackle these challenges included information events for local residents that have been organised in connection with the establishment of reception centres, with staff from reception centres, the operators maintaining the reception centres, municipal

employees, and the Finnish Immigration Service present to answer any questions of the public (EMN 2016, 45).

In total, the reception centre capacity increased considerably during the autumn of 2015. At the end of 2015, there were 212 units in total (including both reception centres and special units for asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors) around the country. The Finnish Immigration Service had commissioned the opening of 184 new reception centres around the country. In 2015, the number of residents in the 144 reception units intended for adults and families increased from 3300 to 27 300 residents. The reception units for asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors increased from 8 to 68, and the number of residents in these increased from only 150 at the end of 2014, to 2500 at the end of 2015 (EMN 2016, 47).

The arrival of mainly Iraqi and Afghan asylum seekers continued until Sweden introduced border controls on 12 November 2015 at the border with Denmark. This made it difficult for asylum seekers to travel to Finland via Sweden. All the land routes to Finland were now closed, except for the border with Russia. Ultimately, the arrival of cold winter weather also made travel more difficult and dangerous, and in 2016 the number of asylum seekers had clearly decreased. Thus, the government did not have to realise the plans they made public on 11 November, to accommodate large numbers of asylum seekers in tents (Ministry of the Interior 2015a).

In addition to the reception of asylum seekers, the resettlement of quota refugees continued as planned in 2015. The annual refugee quota had been slightly increased by the budget decision taken by the previous Parliament, and 1034 quota refugees were selected among refugees registered by UNHCR in Lebanon, Egypt, Malawi, Zambia and Iran. A majority of the quota refugees were Syrians (638), Congolese nationals (151) and Afghan nationals (139). However, the EMN reports that “the bottleneck of the quota refugee process is the insufficiency of municipal placements” (EMN 2016, 41).

In October 2015, Finland also started to implement the EU decision on relocation of asylum seekers within the EU. The resettlement to Finland began on October 21, 2015, when 50 Eritreans arrived from Italy. Actually, this was one of the first groups to be relocated within the EU, and Finland quickly and efficiently implemented the EU decision, despite the initial hesitation of the government to support the EU decision (cf. Wahlbeck 2019). My interviews with experts confirm that the relocation as such was not considered a big challenge. The administration of the relocations seemed to have been relatively easy to implement in the centralised top-down Finnish asylum system. As an expert interviewee in a government agency explained the process: “Finland had agreed the number to relocate. Our task was only to implement this agreement, and we did it, and it went very well” (WP3_UH_E011_P). In the end, Finland was one of the few countries that implemented the EU relocation plans according to the original plans.

2.2. Main Revisions of the Current Reception System

The Distribution of Asylum Seekers across the National Territory

In Finland, there is no formal criteria for the distribution of asylum seekers across the national territory. The Finnish Immigration Service is in charge of the procedure, and a national data register on asylum seekers is, according to my interviews, a useful tool in the coordination. Yet, there is no fixed regional quota system and the legislation on reception does not provide criteria for the distribution. However, my expert interviews have provided some insights into the actual practices of the spatial distribution of reception centres. Today, the decisions on the opening and closing of reception centres are made

by the Finnish Immigration Service. In practice, the various operators running centres often also play a role in finding suitable premises that they suggest to the Finnish Immigration Service. (Previously this decision-making also involved the Ministry of the Interior and the regional ELY centres, but as described previously, the decision-making has been moved to the Finnish immigration Service.) The results from my interviews indicate that we need to take into account that Finland is a sparsely populated country with huge geographical distances. From this follows that: a) Reception centres, especially those that function as transit centres, should preferably not be situated too far from entry points of asylum seekers. b) Reception centres, especially those that accommodate asylum seekers for a longer period of time, should preferably be in a region or city where they may be expected to stay if they get a positive decision, which supports a distribution of the centres in different regions, in practice a distribution following the regions of the ELY centres. c) Many asylum seekers move to private accommodation among friends or relatives in Finland at some stage during the asylum process. The reception centre that they administratively continue to belong to have to be situated nearby. d) The reception centres should also preferably be close to an office of the Finnish Immigration Service, where the asylum interviews take place. These practical reasons explain why reception centres are often situated in the major cities. Yet, the interviewees stressed that a concentration of everything in the capital region of Helsinki is avoided, and centres are therefore often found in regional centres like Tampere, Turku and Oulu. (This may be related to the fact that a geographical decentralisation of state institutions and jobs from the capital region of Helsinki to other parts of Finland has been government policy for a long time.) Finally, there is also the most important criterion that decides the location of centres, which is the economic consideration. As already indicated in this report, the Finnish Immigration Service has been very concerned about the cost-effectiveness of reception measures. Thus, the premises of a reception centre cannot be too expensive. This is the reason why many reception centres have been opened in disused large building, e.g. closed school buildings or hospitals. This type of buildings can often be found in rural municipalities with a negative demographic development. The last-mentioned economic criteria explains why reception centres, despite the previously mentioned priorities, also can be found outside of the cities in relatively remote locations.

The current reception system has also been influenced by the legal changes that the Sipilä government has introduced in the aftermath of the increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2015. These revisions in legislation were mainly new restrictions and limitations that would make it more difficult to get asylum (cf. EMN 2016, 39). The government published a key "Government Action Plan on Asylum Policy" on the 8 of December 2015, which stated that "Finland's short-term objective is to stop the uncontrolled flow of asylum seekers into our country, to bring asylum costs under control and to integrate effectively those who have been granted asylum" (Government of Finland 2015b, 1). Based on the action plan, the government suggested a total of 12 different amendments to the Alien's Act which mostly can be characterised as more restrictive policies. The changes included the major change to remove the possibility of granting a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds. Thus, the various compassionate grounds that previously had granted protection to about one per cent of the asylum applicants would no longer be a valid reason for a residence permit. The proposals also included limiting access to council during the immigration interviews, shortening the time within which an appeal has to be made on the negative asylum decision and tightening the family reunification criteria (Government of Finland 2015b; Wahlbeck 2019; Saarikkomäki et al. 2018).

In 2015, the Government also discussed the legal possibilities to decrease the amount of the reception allowance to asylum seekers, but the proposal was never made since it was found to conflict with the equal treatment guaranteed by the Constitution of Finland. "The Government Action Plan on Asylum"

explicitly emphasised the need to harmonise asylum policies with the EU and the Nordic countries (Government of Finland 2015b). The interviews indicated that experts and politicians were very concerned about the fact that Finland may attract asylum seekers and immigrants because of better services or less restrictive policies than other countries. Thus, many of the restrictions and changes of services can be interpreted as part of what researchers have called a “race to the bottom”, where Finland clearly aim to not have policies that are perceived as more attractive than the policies in other countries.

As a measure by the new government, The Ministry of the Interior prepared a review of the criteria of international protection. The objective was “to prepare the required legislative amendments so that the criteria of Finnish residence permits issued on the basis of international protection would be in line with the EU regulation. The aim was also that the Finnish legislation would not be more favourable in this respect when compared with other EU Member States” (EMN 2016, 39). In the interviews made for this research project, many experts pointed out that the authorities found it important that Finland should not be seen as an attractive country for asylum seekers.

The government also decided to improve the efficiency of the collection of fees charged for the processing of the residence permit, with provisions regulating that the authorities would not continue the processing of an application for asylum until the applicant had paid the chargeable processing fee (EMN 2016, 39).

Many of the legal changes proposed by the government in 2015 were explicitly presented as a review of asylum legislation to comply with EU decisions, although some of the changes had been planned for a long time. For example, the residence permit given because of “humanitarian protection” was abolished, since it was only based on Finland’s national decision and not based on the UN Convention or EU legislation. The official press release explicitly made reference to the EU Qualifications Directive (Ministry of the Interior 2015b). The Ministry of the Interior (2005b) also made public plans to review the family reunification criteria, “to comply with the EU Family Reunification Directive”. The criteria would now be tightened “in accordance” with the additional requirements to be applied at the national level as decided by the Member States, as laid down in the Directive. Thus, the Government explicitly referred to CEAS Directives to find support for the introduction more restrictive asylum policies in 2015, which can be interpreted as process of Europeanisation of asylum policies (Wahlbeck 2019).

In 2016 and 2017, the number of asylum seekers decreased continuously. Actually, most of the persons covered by reception services in 2017 were persons who initially had sought asylum in Finland already in 2015. This is partly explained by the fact that the number of subsequent applications is high, and, in addition, the asylum processes have been extended for many of the asylum seekers who arrived in Finland in 2015, due to the appeal procedures. A low quality of decisions and the lack of appropriate legal help was a concern repeatedly mentioned by human rights organisations and Finnish media in 2016 and 2017. An indication of possible problems with first instance decisions is that more than half of all second instance decisions were positive in Finland in 2017 (65 percent), which was the highest percentage in the EU (EASO 2018, 13).

The Sources and Modes of Funding and the Organisation and Delivery of Reception Services

The reception centres in Finland are, and have always been, fully funded by the state, and the opening of a centre has required a decision by the relevant state authority. The services provided to asylum seekers are paid from the state budget. As described in detail this report, the development of the reception system has involved a centralisation of the decision-making to the Finnish Immigration

Service, which today has the right to coordinate and decide on the opening and closing of reception centres. All asylum seekers administratively belong to one centre, already upon arrival and registration in Finland a specific centre is assigned as being responsible for the asylum seeker. This centre provides the reception services to the asylum seeker in question. According to the law, the service provided is the same in all reception centres. During the application process, asylum seekers may be moved from one centre to another. The different types of centres include transit centres, reception centres for long-term stay (including family homes and accommodation for unaccompanied minors), and temporary registration centres. All these different types of centres are according to the Reception Act considered “reception centres”. According to the law, there are specific requirements on a reception centre. For example, it needs to be run by a competent director, and the staff needs to include a professional social worker, a health professional, and a minimum number of attendants. As outlined elsewhere in this report, the reception centre provides the asylum seekers with a variety of services, including a reception allowance, basic health care and some study courses and activities. The expenses of the centre that the state covers are defined in a detailed contract between the Finnish Immigration Service and the service provider. There is a variety of service providers that run reception centres.

The arrival of a large number of asylum seekers in 2015 created a situation with much more heterogeneity among the centres, since both the number of centres and the number and character of the operators running centres increased. The reception capacity was at its peak in February–March 2016, with 227 reception centres in operation and offering capacity for approximately 32,000 individuals. At the end of 2016, there were 126 reception centres in operation and approximately 19,550 individuals were still covered by the reception system. About 14,900 were in units for adults and families, and about 700 in units for unaccompanied minors. The rest were in private accommodation. In 2017, reception capacity was further reduced and adjusted to correspond to the smaller number of new asylum seekers. At the end of the year 2017, there were only 56 reception centres in operation. There were approximately 13,400 individuals covered by the reception system, of whom 8,900 were in units for adults and families, 74 in units for unaccompanied minors and the rest in private accommodation (EMN 2018, 36).

In 2017, EMN reports that “there were no significant new openings in the area of immigration policy or integration policy; instead, the implementation of policies and programmes set up in previous years continued.” (EMN 2018, 4). A payment card in the reception system was introduced in 2017 (EASO 2018, 148). The payment card started to be used in 2018 for paying all financial benefits to asylum seekers. A further aim of the card was to improve asylum seekers’ opportunities to find employment (EMN 2018, 37).

In 2017, The Finnish Immigration Service’s position as the authority responsible for foreign-national matters strengthened further. From the beginning of the year, all permit matters for foreign nationals were concentrated in the Finnish Immigration Service. The Finnish Immigration Service assumed full responsibility of asylum investigations (establishing entry into the country, identity, and travel route as part of the asylum interview). Previously, the Police had been responsible for decision-making for certain types of residence permits and practices related to permit matters⁶. The Finnish Immigration Service also took over the remaining state-owned reception centres, and starting from 1 January 2018

⁶ A legislative amendment on transferring these tasks from the Police and the Border Guard to the Finnish Immigration Service entered into force on 1 January 2017. In practice, the transfer of authority had already been carried out in 2016 pursuant to Section 210 of the Aliens Act, according to which the Finnish Immigration Service may take up a matter that is to be decided by the Police (EASO 2018, 68).

both of Finland's detention units (EASO 2018; EMN 2018)⁷. These changes strengthened the Finnish Immigration Service's position as the authority responsible for asylum issues. The aim of the changes was reported to be a reduction of overlapping administration and to achieve financial savings in the long term. Thus, since January 2017, the Finnish Immigration Service is entitled to decide on the opening or closing, and to determine the locations of all reception centres without specific authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior (EASO 2018, 67-68).

According to the Finnish Immigration Service in 2017, reception capacity was reduced with the aim of giving residents an opportunity to lead an independent life (EMN 2018). It was reported to EASO from the Reception Unit of the Finnish Immigration Service that, in terms of reception policy objectives, Finland encouraged independence of asylum seekers by favouring centres in which customers could buy their own food and cook their own meals. Centres were also preferred that "improved asylum seekers' opportunities to engage in gainful employment and earn their own livelihood" (EASO 2018, 147).

In 2018, reception services were no longer provided to rejected applicants whose removal the authorities could not enforce, and who refused to return voluntarily to their home country. The Ministry of the Interior reported to EASO (2018, 147) that reception services had been discontinued for 800 persons. In practice, this decision may make people paperless and they may have to rely on various emergency shelters provided by charities, religious congregations and municipalities. These types of shelters have previously mainly provided for homeless people, drug addicts and other people who for some reason fall through the social safety net in Finland, and the paperless persons now constitute an additional group of customers. The situation of paperless persons has become a highly debated human rights issue, especially after the decision to abolish residence permits for humanitarian reasons, which previously could have been used to provide people in this precarious situation with a legal status.

Changes introduced in the Aliens Act in Finland in February 2017 also made it possible to impose an obligation to stay at an assigned place (with a reporting obligation to certain reception centres) for adults and children above 15 years old who have been issued with a negative asylum decision and a return decision. This change was reported to be introduced as "an alternative to detention". An adult applicant can be subjected to the residence obligation even before the asylum decision, to "ensure the smooth flow of the asylum process". This involves that an asylum seeker must report at the reception centre daily, but their movements are not otherwise restricted. Such residence requirement may be imposed by the Police, the Finnish Immigration Service or the Finnish Border Guard on a case-by-case consideration (EASO 2018, 157).

2.3. The Formal Governance Structure Today

In the following, I will outline the formal structure of the reception policies and practices in Finland, divided into the national, regional and local administrative level. There are no *formal* venues or institutions aimed at favouring exchange between different levels of government or between state and non-state actors. In the next chapter, this will be followed by an overview of the concrete functioning of the reception system today, including discussions of how various actors may create

⁷ In January 2017, the Finnish Immigration Service took over the state-owned reception centres in Oulu and Joutseno, while the transfer of the Metsälä detention unit from the City of Helsinki to the Finnish Immigration Service took place in January 2018 (EASO 2018, 68)

informal venues for exchange between different levels of government and between state and non-state actors.

The State Level

The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the general development and coordination of the immigration and integration policies, including the reception of asylum seekers. However, as outlined in the Integration Act, the implementation of integration policies are the responsibility of regional and local authorities, predominantly the local municipalities within the framework of the normal welfare state structures. Thus, there is both a legal and administrative distinction that has to be made between reception and integration.

The Ministry of the Interior steers and develops the administration of migration, and coordinates migration related issues between different branches of government. The Ministry represents Finland in migration matters, both within the European Union and in the international arena (Ministry of the Interior 2018). The Finnish Immigration Service, the Police and the Border Guard operate under the Ministry of the Interior. In 2018, The Finnish Immigration Service issues residence permits, processes applications for asylum, steers the work of reception centres, makes decisions on refusal of entry and deportation, and is responsible for the processing of citizenship applications and the issuance of alien's passports (Ministry of the Interior 2018). The Finnish Border Guard monitors entry into and departure from the country and carries out passport control. The police monitor compliance with the Aliens Act. The police also notify aliens of decisions to remove them from the country and are responsible for ensuring that they return to their country of departure (Ministry of the Interior 2018).

In addition to the Ministry of the Interior, some other ministries have tasks in relation to migration and asylum. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is responsible for visa policy. Finnish missions abroad grant visas and accept citizenship declarations and residence permit applications. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is responsible for directing integration matters for refugees who have received a residence permit and the ministry also monitors labour migration. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is tasked with the promotion of immigrants' health and well-being, as well as issues related to immigrants' means of support. The Ministry of Education and Culture develops education and training for immigrants at different levels of education. Its mandate also covers immigration matters relating to culture, sport, youth work and religion. The National Board of Education is responsible for matters relating to immigrant education and training, and for recognising the qualifications of foreign nationals (Ministry of the Interior 2018).

A small independent state authority is the Ombudsman for Non-Discrimination, who is responsible for promoting equality and takes action to intervene in cases of discrimination. The Ombudsman is also responsible for promoting the rights and position of foreign nationals. In addition, the Ombudsman has a special task of monitoring the enforcement of removal decisions concerning foreign nationals and acting as the national rapporteur on human trafficking. The office of the Ombudsman is, however, small, and many human rights organisations have stressed the need for sufficient resources to carry out these tasks.

The Regional Level

There are 15 regional Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres), which are responsible for the regional implementation and development tasks of the central government. This includes a regional coordination of immigration and a responsibility for preparing for

large-scale influxes of migrants at regional level, together with municipalities and NGOs. The tasks also include the coordination of the refugee resettlement in municipalities, the promotion of integration of immigrants and the promotion of good ethnic relations. The ELY Centres work under The Ministry of Employment and the Economy, but also take care of some tasks from other ministries.

Finland is not a federal state, and the regional authorities are basically, either branches of the state authorities, or organisations that take care of various regional cooperation of municipalities. However, at the time of writing, there are government plans for a major social welfare and health care reform, where most of the responsibility for providing health and social services is being transferred from the municipalities to larger administrative entities. These plans involve the introduction of 15 new counties with their own governance and elected boards. These would also take over the tasks of the ELY Centres that would cease to exist. However, the necessary political decisions for this reform has still not been taken at the time of writing in December 2018.

The Local Level

In Finland, the tasks of the municipalities are relatively extensive, and include social services, educational services and health services to all people who live permanently in the municipality. Municipalities have a degree of autonomy that is defined in the Local Government Act (410/2015). For example, municipal decisions are required for the organised resettlement of refugees that is agreed with the state authorities. Thus, the refugee resettlement and immigrant integration policies are in Finland implemented at the local level. The Integration Act (1386/2010) details the overall goals of integration policy, the responsibility for providing the integration measures lies at the local level with the municipalities. Yet, the responsibility of the municipality is formally limited to the case of permanent residency. In general, rights and services in Finland tend to be connected to whether you are a permanent resident of the country or not. Immigrants are covered by the Finnish social security system if they intend to live permanently in Finland. The municipalities provide services to everybody who is a permanent resident of the municipality, regardless of the nationality of the resident. Every individual establishing permanent residence becomes a resident of some municipality. Individuals are, according to the Act on the Application of Residence-Based Social Security Legislation (1573/1993), considered to be settling permanently from the first day of arrival when they are considered to move to Finland to reside in the country on a permanent basis. In the case of immigrants and refugees, this is the case if they have been granted a residence permit valid for at least 12 months. The residence-based social security is a significant delimitation in the case of asylum seekers, since they are not considered to live permanently in a municipality and they are therefore not formally covered by municipal services before they get a positive decision. Thus, the reception of asylum seekers is not initially the task of municipalities. Most of the services provided to asylum seekers are, in practice, the responsibility of the reception centres, which operate with state funding.

In addition, non-governmental organisations produce various local services, provide asylum seekers with assistance and advice, and contribute to integration activities. The Finnish Red Cross and its local branches play a significant role both in reception and resettlement activities. Yet, the role of non-governmental organisations has to be understood within the framework of the Nordic welfare state model, where the role of public state funding is central and the activities of NGOs tend to rely on a cooperation and contracts with the relevant public authorities.

3. Concrete Functioning of the Governance of the Reception System Today

3.1. National Governance

All the interviewees in this study, either explicitly or implicitly, found the Finnish reception system to be fairly bureaucratic. The civil servants and employees in NGOs provided elaborate explanations of the functioning of the system from the perspective of legal frameworks and formal institutional structures. One of the experts in a government agency summarised the Finnish governance of reception in the following way:

The administration of reception has to be seen as part of the general structures and traditions of public administration. The way that the Finnish public administration in general works is always regulated to some extent and can even be relatively bureaucratic. The reception activities are embedded in the administrative practices and structures in Finland (WP3_UH_E013_P)

In this type of system, there may be relatively few opportunities for informal relations of political actors. Yet, the interviewed volunteers and reception workers provided some examples of informal relations that tried to overcome the negative consequences of the bureaucratic systems. Much of the help provided by volunteers to asylum seekers was to help them navigate the Finnish bureaucracy or to find different types of loopholes in the reception system to support integration. These types of activities of the volunteers will be described in the local case studies below.

The key institution in the national governance of reception policies is the government. The top-down structure of governance of reception policies is largely led by the relevant ministries, who implement the government programmes. The governments of Finland tend to be broad-based coalition governments. The government programmes are a good source of information since they outline the political goals and compromises that have been agreed among the coalition partners. Most of the government programmes in the 2000s have expressed a strong commitment to EU harmonisation and the development of international cooperation in the area of asylum and migration (Government of Finland 2007, 2011). The Nordic welfare state model and the universal provision of services to all residents in Finland finds support across all parties in Finland, but some differences in priorities can be found. In migration policy, the governments led by right-wing National Coalition Party have emphasised the need for skilled labour and a rapid integration of immigrants and refugees into the labour market, e.g. the Katainen government programmes mentioned previously in this report (Government of Finland 2011).

The most recent restrictive Finnish asylum policies can be understood against the fact that a brand new type of coalition government was formed in 2015. The party led by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä from the agrarian Centre Party includes two other parties: the euro-sceptic and populist party of The (True) Finns and the conservative National Coalition Party. This new political constellation in Finnish politics made it necessary for the government internally to negotiate new political compromises in immigration, refugee and EU policy issues. The Finns Party included a vociferous so-called “immigration-critical” fraction and the party demanded restrictive immigration policies in general, which partly was reflected in the Sipilä Government Programme (cf. Government of Finland 2015a). The Sipilä government thus represent a clear change in migration policy and, as outlined previously in this report, under this government there have been numerous restrictive asylum laws and policies introduced, to an extent that has not been the case under previous governments.

The key ministry that coordinates asylum policy is the Ministry of the Interior. The ministry is responsible for drafting legislation on asylum, migration and citizenship. The openness/closeness of this process is difficult to measure. There is formally quite a large openness since the preparation of

laws involves a broad and extensive consultation of experts, stakeholders and NGOs. Finally, there are political debates and decisions in the Parliament. However, I find it more difficult to judge to what extent different actors have a power to influence the process. My presentation in this report gives some suggestions of broader developments that can explain changes in asylum legislation, including a general europeanisation, bureaucratic concerns of civil servants, party politics, and human rights concerns of NGOs. However, the possibility to influence the process seems to depend on both the topic and context, and different interests are given different weight. In any case, when the proposals reach the Parliament it is towards the end of the political process rather than the start.

The Asylum Process in Practice

A person who applies for asylum cannot be denied entry and is directed to a reception centre. Initially this will be a transit centre, which is a reception centre or a part of a reception centre where the applicant stays for the asylum interview and initial assessment of the application; later the applicant can be moved to another reception centre that offer long-term accommodation. Most asylum seekers are also physically accommodated in reception centres while waiting for their application to be processed. Many also arrange their own accommodation, for example with relatives living in Finland, although they remain administratively connected to one reception centre. The Finnish Immigration Service is responsible for the steering of reception centres for asylum seekers. Centres are run by different operators, for example the state or the Finnish Red Cross. Reception centres are located throughout Finland in both rural and urban locations. Unaccompanied minors are accommodated in separate group homes and support housing units. The child is always placed in a group home while the situation assessment is being made. The unaccompanied minors who have relatives can be placed to live with the latter, once the assessment of the situation has been made. The municipality provide school teaching for all people of school age in the municipality, regardless of official residence status. Children of school age attend a preparatory training class intended for immigrants, which may be organised in the centre or in the local school. The school may also choose to integrate all children in regular classes. In Finland, all schools are run by the municipality and are funded by a calculated state support paid to the municipality. There is an additional state support provided to the municipalities for all minor asylum seekers and refugees.

All reception centres are state funded and the centre provide asylum seekers with means of support and care. While awaiting decisions on their asylum applications, asylum seekers are entitled to reception services under the Reception Act. They are provided with accommodation, financial support and other care. In 2015, the basic amount of the monthly reception allowance that is paid to asylum seekers was EUR 316.07 at maximum. The allowance is intended to secure their basic needs, such as food and clothes (Ministry of the Interior 2015d). Asylum seekers may start to work after three months from filing the asylum application. If the identity of applicants cannot be established, they may not work until after six months.

Before the asylum seekers get a positive decision, the service provider is mainly the reception centre and not the municipality. The reception centres are run by a director, and the staff needs to include a professional social worker, a health professional, and the required minimum number of attendants. Asylum seekers have the right to get social services in accordance with the Act on Social Services (14§) if the professional social worker find it necessary. In the case of child protection cases the reception centre involves the municipal child protection official. Adult asylum seekers have the right to basic health service, while underage asylum seekers have the same right to health care as any resident of the municipality (as discussed previously in this report). The reception centres have an agreement on

the provision of health services with a commercial health company. The health professional in the centre directs those in need of health care to the health care provider of the reception centre. The municipal health care is not provided free of charge to asylum seekers, but vaccinations can be provided free of charge within the national vaccination programmes.

The reception centre provides different types of activities related to study courses and work orientation. Participation in these activities is compulsory, and a failure to participate may result in a decrease in the reception allowance. The study courses usually include training in the Finnish language, while the work orientation usually include cleaning and services around the reception centre. Volunteers often organise additional activities. The volunteers may be volunteers active in the Finnish Red Cross, who provide a training for this purpose, or other volunteers.

Asylum seekers have the right to get legal counselling concerning their asylum application. The fee is paid by state funding by the public legal advice offices of the municipality. An important provider of legal help is also the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre, an NGO specialised in legal help for asylum seekers. The reception centre provides limited interpretation services, for example the necessary interpretation needed for health services. Asylum seekers receive an official card with a photograph of the applicant, which is not an official identification card, but a proof that the person has applied for asylum. The reception services end when the person has received a decision on the asylum application. After this, the person is given a reasonable time to move out of the reception centre. The reception centre may help to find a place in a municipality, but the person may also independently do it. If the applicant gets a negative decision, the reception services of adults end after 30 days.

The Finnish Immigration Service conducts the asylum interview and decides on the need for international protection. The applicant can appeal against a negative decision to an administrative court. The time it takes to decide on an asylum application may vary considerably. On average, the first instance asylum decision was made in 117 days in 2015, 261 days in 2016 and 357 days in 2017 (MIGRI 2018, 20). The insufficient speed and the quality of the decisions have been widely discussed topics in public debates in recent years. Without going into the heated debate, it can be concluded that many asylum seekers spend a very long time in reception centres before they get a decision.

After a Positive Decision: Becoming a Resident of a Municipality

The placement in municipalities of persons who have been granted international protection has been the responsibility of the ELY Centres for some time. There are currently two operating models used for relocation to municipalities: under the model that has been prioritised by the authorities, the ELY Centre assigns a place in a municipality for a person who has been granted international protection. The municipality is thereby able to organise housing and plan integration measures, in similar way as the municipalities provide for quota refugees (EMN 2015). The Association of Local and Regional Authorities (2006b) (an association representing the municipalities) have pointed out that cooperation between reception centres, ELY centres and the municipalities in question need to be improved in relation to the movement of refugees into the municipalities. According to the association, there is a need to direct refugees to those municipalities where integration measures can be organised and the labour market can provide jobs (Association 2016b).

The ELY centres provide municipalities with reimbursement for the costs arising from the integration measures implemented during the first three or four years of the migrant's residence in a given municipality. Still, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (2016a; 2016b) have pointed out that the amounts of this compensation are insufficient to cover the actual additional costs.

The amount of the compensation was set in 1993, and since then it has only been marginally increased two times (Association of... 2016a). It is voluntary for the municipality to sign an agreement on the resettlement of refugees, but the existence of an agreement is required if the municipality wants to receive the state compensation for integration measures (Association of... 2016b).

A person who has been granted international protection can also move independently from a reception centre to a municipality. In recent years, the number of places in municipalities allocated by the ELY Centres has been insufficient. Accordingly, the number of persons with international protection status who relocate to municipalities independently tends to be higher than the number of persons placed in municipalities by ELY Centres. For example, in 2014, 1267 persons relocated from reception centres to municipalities independently, and only 317 were placed by the ELY Centres (EMN 2015, 42).

Integration Policies of Municipalities

As outlined in the Integration Act, the municipalities organise measures and services promoting and supporting the integration of immigrants. However, as Koikkalainen (forthcoming) points out, an aspect of the Finnish integration system is that the municipalities have some autonomy in how the integration process is supported, and may, for example, choose to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities in providing services. According to the Integration Act, each municipality is tasked with and responsible of making an integration programme for promoting integration and for strengthening multi-sectoral cooperation, which is approved by the municipal council of each municipality and should be reviewed at least once every four years.

In the municipality, the practical integration work is often the task of municipal social workers or specific coordinators of the municipal refugee affairs. The explicit aim of the Integration Act is also to support the opportunities of immigrants to preserve their own language and culture. For example, there is some (although rather limited) funding available for immigrant associations both on the municipal and the state levels to conduct cultural activities. Furthermore, elementary and high schools are obliged to provide some education in the pupil's own language and religion once enough students demand it. The teaching of minority religions and certain minority languages at schools predates contemporary integration legislation, but it has expanded due to immigration since the 1990s (Martikainen et al. 2012; Saukkonen 2013; Wahlbeck 2013).

Martikainen, Valtonen and Wahlbeck (2012) found that the municipal refugee resettlement policies and the general understanding of the process of social integration of refugees had stayed more or less the same in Finland since the arrival of the early refugee and immigrant groups in the late 1980s. According to the Integration Act, the purpose is to support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society. Two central features of the way social integration is understood in Finland are evident in the Integration Act. Firstly, the major focus is on the *individual's* integration in the *labour market*, and secondly, the active involvement of the *welfare state* institutions in this process. Thus, refugees and immigrants in Finland are easily perceived as clients or customers of the welfare state institutions (cf. Martikainen et al. 2012, 132).

In addition to well-established welfare state structures, projects have more recently become a key platform to develop services for refugees. Many projects are run by local and state authorities, but also private companies and NGOs have a strong presence. Major sources of funding are a few national and European funds, most notably Finland's Slot Machine Association, and the European Social Fund (Martikainen et al. 2012). Thus, there are general processes of "projectification", outsourcing and

privatisation that influences service provisions in general, and these developments have repercussions in both the reception systems and integration programmes.

Immigrants and refugees are offered language instruction and labour market training programmes. Similar to mainstream education activity in Finland, these study periods are connected to income support mechanisms, which facilitate participation. In families with children, childcare services enable both parents to take part in language courses in the early years of residence. State childcare programmes, as gender equity promoting services, have in principle improved female immigrants' formal position in the labour market and facilitated their participation in paid employment (Martikainen et al. 2012, Valtonen 2015).

It can be argued that, in general, all permanently settled immigrants have relatively strong social rights in Finland (cf. Valtonen 2004; Wahlbeck 2008; Martikainen et al. 2012). However, the question is to what extent these social rights can be realised and whether the structures of Finnish society really permit a true social integration of immigrants. In practice, discrimination and unequal opportunities might constitute an obstacle for the integration process. For example, membership in the welfare state has not of itself opened the doors to full participation in the case of immigrants in the areas of employment (Valtonen 2004, Martikainen et al 2012). In general, a lower percentage of the immigrants are part of the labour force compared to the total population, which can be explained by the higher than average number of people in education and women staying at home taking care of children. The employment rate among nationality groups with a large proportion of refugees tends to be particularly low (Sarvimäki 2017). Thus, despite the extensive language instruction and labour market training programmes, the integration of refugees into the Finnish labour market has been difficult, and will probably continue to constitute a challenge in the years to come.

3.2. Governance at Local Level: The Case Studies of Laitila and Pargas

Laitila

The town of Laitila is an active industrial and service centre of about 8500 people and 600 businesses in Southwest Finland, in the region of Finland proper (*Varsinais-Suomi*). The centre of Laitila is located at the junction of road 8 from Turku to the north and road 43 from Uusikaupunki to Tampere. The area of the municipality is 545 square kilometres (dry land: 531 km² and water area: 14 km²). The unemployment rate is 6.5 percent, the rate of job self-sufficiency in the municipality is 102 percent. The business structure of the jobs include farming and forestry: 10 percent; industry and building: 40 percent; Services: 50 percent (Laitila 2018). The foreign citizens constitute 2,5 percent of the population.

The political profile of the Municipal Council (the municipal assembly): The largest party is the agrarian Centre Party with 14 seats of 31 in total (in national politics this is one of the three largest parties, and it tends to display a moderate immigration position and some hesitation concerning EU integration), The Green Party holds one seat, but the Left Alliance has no seat. The Social Democratic party holds 6/31 seats and the conservative National Alliance party 4/31. The populist, immigration-critical and Eurosceptic Finns Party holds 2/31 seats. A unique feature of the municipal council is that the small anti-EU and anti-NATO party, the Independence Party holds 2/31 seats, a party which in national elections get less than 1 per cent of the votes.

An emergency accommodation for about 200 asylum seekers was rapidly opened on 4 September 2015 by the regional Finnish Red Cross district, which had the authorisation from the Finnish Immigration

Service to open emergency accommodations. In the beginning, the centre in Laitila was administratively led by the reception centre in Turku, which had become severely overcrowded already in August and accommodated far more people than it had space for in tents and other emergency locations. In practice, the fact that the centre was administratively led from Turku meant that the professional social worker required by law initially was located in Turku. However, the status of the centre in Laitila was transformed into an independent reception centre with all the legally required staff and about 150 places in late October 2015 (SPR 2016). This transformation required the approval from the Finnish Immigration Service (which, as described earlier in this report, had received a general authorisation to decide on these matters from the Ministry of the Interior). The location of the centre was a disused privately-owned guesthouse that was rented by the regional Finnish Red Cross district. The size of the rent of the premises was approved by the Finnish Immigration Service. All the costs of the centre were paid by state funding, which was paid by the Finnish Immigration Service to the Red Cross district.

The centre had a staff of about 12 people, but many local volunteers were actively involved in the running of the centre right from the start. At the beginning, the volunteers were about 120 enthusiastic people. The volunteers included people previously active in the local Red Cross organisation, but also many new local volunteers were eager to help the asylum seekers. The centre mainly accommodated single young men, mainly from Iraq and Afghanistan, but there was also enough children for a separate preparatory training class run by the local school.

The municipality of Laitila had little experience of refugees. Neither Laitila nor any of the municipalities they traditionally cooperate with in the Vakka-Suomi region had taken part in the resettlement of quota refugees (cf. Vakka-Suomi 2015). A delegate from the Christian Democratic Party had suggested an agreement on reception of quota refugees already in 2014, but a political decision had not been reached by the municipality. One key reason seemed to be the insufficient economic state support given to municipalities. The municipal committee for social affairs which prepared the issue made explicit reference to the calculations made by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, which pointed out that the financial compensation from the state to the municipality is insufficient to cover the full costs of refugee resettlement. Since the suggestion to sign an agreement on reception of refugees did not get support in the Municipal Council, the whole issue was not brought forward.

We did have some discussions before 2015. However, there was no political support or interest for the reception of refugees. I remember that the economic issues were discussed, and I think it was also generally felt that Laitila is not the right place for refugee reception. This is a small town and there are many challenges. [...] It is not correct that the state forces us to take care of issues at the same time as they cut our funding. (WP3_UH_E022_P)

The Municipality Board (the executive board) was consulted on the opening of the reception centre when the emergency accommodation was already in place. The Municipal Board (D KH 222/2015) received a request to formally open a reception centre in a letter from the regional Red Cross district, which outlined the formalities involved as well as some information about the acute reception situation in the region. The Municipal Board is the municipal authority that replies to these requests, and they decided on 19 October with the vote 6-2 that they did not see any objection to open a reception centre. However, the Board added that the present number of 200 asylum seekers should not be exceeded taking into account the available resources for services in the municipality. The Board informed the Municipal Council on 2 November 2015, but at this time the accommodation of asylum

seekers had already been going on for two months, and had been widely discussed in media and social media for a long time.

Of course, we all followed the news and we knew that that there was a crisis. Finally, also the President and Prime Minister had urged everybody to help. Of course, if there is national crisis, you will help and Laitila will do its share. We will do our share or more. [...] I think most people agree that we should help with what is required. [...] However, it is another issue what we can do and what is the most efficient way to handle things. This is something that needs to be discussed and I do not think we have done it. When it was discussed [in the Municipality Board] the refugees were already here. We should have had more influence early on. Things did not work as they should have, and I think it was not sufficiently controlled. People had strong opinions about this. (WP3_UH_E021_P)

As already described extensively in this report, the actual running of reception centres is not the issue of the municipality, and since it was felt that the centre may bring some jobs, which would bring municipal tax money, it found support in the executive Municipal Board. Yet, there was uncertainty and some hesitation since the municipality had not received refugees or asylum seekers before. Among the elected members of the Municipal Council, there was even more hesitation and a diversity of opinions. Among local politicians, there was some disappointment that their opinion was sought only after the centre already de-facto existed in the municipality, but many also felt that the municipality should do its own share and contribute to the reception of asylum seekers, which in October 2015 still was an acute situation in Finland.

Initially, there was a large local public support for the reception centre and many enthusiastic volunteers worked long hours in the reception centre. Yet, those that were opposing the centre were also very vocal and active in social media. This was especially the case after an asylum seeker was reported to the police for committing a rape in March 2017. Thus, the local opinion about the reception centre was clearly divided and polarised, mirroring a broader national polarisation of opinions in Finland (cf. Pyrhönen & Wahlbeck 2018).

Things moved fast and it is difficult to remember how I got involved. I think everybody was involved, it was a big thing. When the local Red Cross was informed, we immediately started to prepare. There was an information meeting. [...] People from everywhere really helped a lot. It was not only the few that previously had been active in the Red Cross, but now there was plenty of volunteers, all kinds of people and all were very eager to help. [...] We collected clothes and any other things that the asylum seekers might have a need for. We were many that worked long hours in the reception centre, we did not count hours and people did put in whatever time they had to spare. (WP3_UH_E020_P)

In the running of the reception centre, some differences in opinion has been reported between the staff and the volunteers about how to professionally run the centre. These disagreements were reported in the local newspaper and a complaint was made by some volunteers to the regional board of the Red Cross district, which looked into the matter but did not find reason for further action (SPR 2016). According to some volunteers, the staff did not treat asylum seekers respectfully. According to the director, these were unfounded claims and found that it was unfortunate that many of the volunteers had not taken part in the Red Cross training for volunteers. There seems to have been some confusion concerning the role of the volunteers in the daily work. The differences in the role of a friend and the role of a volunteer helping in the running of the centre was confused with each other. For example, when the staff informed the volunteers that no further collection of clothes was needed,

clothes continued to be brought into the centre by the volunteers and were unevenly distributed among the asylum seekers, which later became an issue of controversy out of proportion between staff and volunteers. In any case, many volunteers found that their work and contributions to the centre was not valued as it should be. In separate developments, four members of the staff were reported to have started a close relationship with a customer, which also was mentioned in a media report of the conflicts at the reception centre. The Finnish Red Cross replied to the media that relationships may be started in reception centres, and Laitila was not exceptional in this matter (Hjelt & Malin 2018).

I do not think that the work of the volunteers is appreciated the way it should be in reception centres. The reception is easily too institutionalised and not flexible enough. [...] There are plenty of strange rules, but when you help people you cannot really follow every paragraph, you need to see the individuals and the needs they have. This is the way I understand that we should meet each other as persons [...] And we will also avoid all kinds of problems if people are integrated in Finnish society in the right way. (WP3_UH_E020_P)

The reception centre in Laitila was closed in August 2017. The remaining asylum seekers were scattered to a variety of other centres. Some of the people that have received a positive decision have remained in the region, since both Laitila and neighbouring municipalities, especially Uusikaupunki, have a labour market with jobs on offer. About 20 of the former asylum seekers are reported to have been employed in the region, which can be considered a good number for a predominantly rural region without any large city. Both the staff of the reception centre and the local volunteers are reported to have had a strong wish for the reception centre to continue in 2017.

In general, the municipality is positive about new businesses and employers, this is a dynamic municipality of small businesses and entrepreneurship. [...] The reception centre did bring jobs and money to the municipality. And the house may have been empty without a centre. When it was understood that the centre was an income and not an extra burden on the municipality, I think it made a difference. [...] And, of course, in the same way as elsewhere in Finland, Laitila needs immigrants. (WP3_UH_E019_P)

Despite the initial hesitation among some municipal politicians when the centre was opened, the Municipal Board supported a continuation of the centre and did whatever it could to try to keep the centre open. Yet, as outlined previously in this report, it is not up to the municipality to decide on the opening and closing of reception centres. The centre was finally closed in August 2017, when as described previously in this report, the reception capacity was reduced by the Finnish Immigration Service for economic reasons.

The experiences in Laitila underlines the need for proper information to the municipalities on the opening of reception centre. As mentioned previously in this report, the need for information has been stressed by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (2016). Yet, the case of Laitila also highlights the difficulty of combining the rapid reactions needed in the reception of asylum seekers with the democratic municipal decision-making processes, which need time.

Pargas (Parainen)

The town of Pargas has a population of 15 500. The municipality is located in South West Finland, geographically situated in the Baltic Sea, between Helsinki and Stockholm, next to the town of Turku and the Åland Islands. The town considers itself the largest archipelago town in the world, with more than 10 000 islands and islets outspread over 5500 square kilometres, of which 80 per cent is water

(Pargas 2018). Numerous bridges and ferries connect the larger islands to each other and it takes several hours to travel from one side of the municipality to the other. The town provides services in two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Swedish-speakers make up the majority of the population. Administratively the municipality has existed since 2009 when five, partly very small municipalities, decided to merge into one (Houtskär, Iniö, Korpo, Nagu and Pargas). The unemployment rate is 7,4 percent. The foreign citizens constitute 5 percent of the population.

The political profile of the Municipal Council: The largest party is the Swedish Peoples Party, which holds 18 seats of 35 in total (i.e. the party holds a single majority). At a national level, this party is a small liberal party, pro-immigration and at least partly pro-EU. Other potentially pro-immigration and partly pro-EU parties include the Green Party (2/35) and the Left Alliance (2/35). Other parties in the council are The Social Democratic Party (6/35); the conservative National Alliance party (4/35) and the populist, often immigration-critical and Eurosceptic Finns Party (2/35).

The municipality has an agreement with the regional ELY centre about the resettlement of quota refugees, 20 Syrian refugees were resettled in the municipality in 2014, and additional quota refugees arrived in 2018. Thus, the municipality had a knowledge of refugee resettlement already before 2015, and it also has a full-time employed coordinator for refugee affairs. In Nagu, one of the villages of the municipality, a reception centre run by the small local Finnish Red Cross district opened in October 2015 and closed in April 2016. Some asylum seekers remained in Nagu and in other parts of the municipality after the centre was closed.

The location of the reception centre was a hotel that was closed during off-season, and already from the start it was clear that this accommodation would be temporary for a six month period only. The hotel had offered its capacity to the Finnish Immigration Service, and the local Red Cross was contacted to ask if they wanted to run a centre in the premises. The period, expenses and the tasks were agreed between the local Red Cross district and the Finnish Immigration Service. The local Red Cross district (which happens to be the smallest district in Finland and had no experience of running reception centres) took the responsibility to run the accommodation and gathered local volunteers to provide help for the asylum seekers. The time to prepare the reception was one and a half month, which was shorter than previously had been the case, but still a relatively long period of time compared to the opening of other reception centres in 2015. The reception centre functioned as an ordinary reception centre (however, despite attempts, no competent social worker could be found and the centre had to rely on buying this expertise from the large Red Cross reception centre in Turku). The accommodation had places for about 100 asylum seekers, and was mainly used as an accommodation for families with children from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, who usually were sent to this reception centre in Southern Finland directly from the registration centre in Tornio in Northern Finland (in buses chartered by the Finnish Immigration Service for the 12 h trip to Nagu).

Nagu is a relatively small local community, where people tend to know each other well. The widespread islands of Nagu had about 1400 residents before it merged into Pargas municipality, and it is only accessible by ferry. The local community rapidly started to prepare to welcome the new arrivals in the small local community. According to the Red Cross district (2016), the reception centre had 140 active volunteers, which made up a large proportion of the adult population of the area. A general idea among the volunteers was that the better the guests were welcomed, the better things would become (Hemmer 2018). The volunteers decided not to call the arrivals refugees or asylum seekers, instead they were referred to as "Strandboare" referring to the name of the accommodation, or simply referred to as the new residents of Nagu. The interviews made with

volunteers confirms that the approach right from the beginning was that the people would feel welcome and that some hopefully would remain living in Nagu. Obviously, there were people that opposed the arrival of asylum seekers, but the welcoming discourse tended to become dominant in a small community with a communitarian ethos. Nagu is a small and a relatively desolate place in the winter time, and several volunteers explained that the new families with children made the place “much more fun” (WP3_UH_E025_P; WP3_UH_E028_P; WP3_UH_E029_P).

Well, I think a reason people were involved as volunteers was that it was so much fun. You know, not much happens in Nagu in the winter. You hardly see any people at all. The reception centre made Nagu a much more fun place. Especially since it was families with children that arrived to the centre, the children you did see a lot. [...] And the volunteers found it rewarding to work together. For many volunteers, it was also a possibility to learn to know each other better. (WP3_UH_E025_P)

All the local formal organisations in Nagu, about 15 various ones, including the local Red Cross branch, the local Fishermen’s association, the local Lutheran congregation, and various other organisations involved the new arrivals in the normal activities of the organisations. Thus, the volunteers utilised the existing community resources, the only thing new was a Facebook group with about 250 members where the volunteers exchanged information. A large number of courses, parties, classes in Finnish, church services (partly in Arabic), and work training could therefore be organised locally for the asylum seekers. The policy of the reception centre was also to be as open as possible to the surrounding society. Although its premises were small, guests were welcomed. The volunteers were also able to use premises owned by the municipality (“in the beginning the municipality wanted us to pay rent, but we used it for free, and I think the municipality gave up in the end” WP3_UH-E027_P). Local small businesses helped with work orientation for the asylum seekers and the small local bank provided help with the distribution of the cash payment of the reception allowance (this was before the general introduction of the payment card in the reception system).

The above described model, where a small local community actively is involved in the reception and integration of refugees started to be called the “Nagu model” (e.g. Hemmer 2018; Lolax 2016). The term was introduced by the British documentary photographer Giles Duley, who reported about the reception of refugees in Nagu in *The Guardian* (Duley 2016). The reception in Nagu has also featured in reports distributed worldwide by the UNHCR (Bach 2017).

The way I understand the “Nagu model” of integration is that nothing new was created by the volunteers for the newcomers in Nagu. Instead, they were integrated into the normal activities of the existing organisations and society in Nagu. (WP3_UH_E025_P)

The activities of the volunteers were helped by the fact that the municipal workers knew the small local community well, and was able to connect the activities of the volunteers with the official work of the municipality. The municipality had a full-time employed coordinator for refugee affairs, whose job was to take care of the quota refugees, and not the asylum seekers (which was not the formal responsibility of the municipality). Yet, the municipal coordinator was free to decide on her work and was able to maintain strong connections to the volunteers and civil society in general. Thus, since the municipality had accepted quota refugees, a bridge could be built between local reception and integration activities. The asylum seekers that received a positive decision could, in principle, more smoothly move into the phase of municipal integration measures, while the resettlement of quota refugees also benefitted from the network of active local volunteers established to support the asylum seekers.

The reception centre in Nagu was only planned for six months, and the local Red Cross and volunteers started to look for ways to organise accommodation after this period. Already in 2015, the municipality offered another premise as a reception centre, its disused former school building Norrgårds. This building was situated in Pargas, a more central location than Nagu. Both the municipality, local volunteers and the local Red Cross favoured a move of the asylum seekers from Nagu to Pargas. However, not all agreed. The empty building was the object of an arson attack in late December 2015, which luckily only damaged the door of the building. Furthermore, a municipal information meeting in Pargas a few days later gathered aggressive far-right anti-immigration activists, mainly from neighbouring municipalities. A move from Nagu to Pargas started to look less attractive, and the idea to provide private accommodation for asylum seekers in Nagu grew stronger among the volunteers. As one volunteer expressed the idea to find private accommodation in the local newspaper “I understand that this may be against all sorts of contracts and rules, but it still has to be allowed to be human” (Kuusisto 2016, translation from Swedish). Thus, the volunteers and various organisations in Nagu supported those asylum seekers that wanted to move into private accommodation. As previously mentioned in this report, reception centres do not provide economic support for private accommodation, and asylum seekers have to finance this themselves. The local volunteers and organisations in Nagu provided both practical support and various economic support to make private accommodation possible. In the end, a system was established where volunteers committed themselves to pay an amount of money to the Finnish Red Cross District, which was used by the District to rent accommodation for those asylum seekers who wanted to stay in Nagu, until they received a decision on their application. This system of renting apartments for asylum seekers was an unconventional arrangement and the Finnish Red Cross district was hesitant. However, the volunteers consulted lawyers on the legality of the arrangement and in the end everything went well. However, the special arrangements had to be in place for a longer period than planned, because of a longer than expected processing times of the asylum applications.

There were many aspects to think about in organising the [private] accommodation. You would think that this would be easy to do, you just do it, since it helps the newcomers to integrate, but to sort out the best way to organise the rent was demanding. [...] In the end it worked since the landlords were positive and people did what they promised. (WP3_UH_E027_P)

In March 2016, the Finnish Immigration Service finally informed the local Red Cross District that there no longer was a need to open new reception centres, since the number of asylum seekers had dropped and there were empty spaces in the existing centres (as outlined previously in this report, the reception capacity was cut in 2016). Thus, the Finnish Immigration Service pulled out from the plan to open a new reception centre in Pargas with short notice. The asylum seekers were to be moved to other reception centres in Finland. This was disappointing for both the asylum seekers, the local volunteers and the employees in the centre. The Finnish immigration Service provided ready-made lists of names of people and various reception centres where people were to be sent (the local newspaper reported that the asylum seekers had not been able to influence where they were to be sent, while according to my interviews that this was not quite true, it had been possible to influence the Finnish Immigration Service (WP3_UH_E023_P; WP3_UH_E024_P). When the buses with the remaining asylum seekers left Nagu in April 2016 it was an emotional farewell. Still, about 30 asylum seekers remained in the municipality, since they had moved into private accommodation organised by the local volunteers. Yet, formally they had become clients of other reception centres responsible for their reception services, which created some logistical challenges. In December 2018, it is reported in my interviews that a large share of the asylum seekers have received a positive decisions. Still, only very few live in Nagu or Pargas

and most have moved to larger cities in Finland, the lack of jobs locally and the relatively high rent in the houses in Nagu was mentioned by my interviewees as key factors behind the move to other locations.

Much of the activities organised by the volunteers in Nagu can be described as *integration* measures, and among the interviewees, no distinction is made between activities supporting a reception of asylum seeker and those supporting an integration or refugees. The local interviewees described the situation as one where some “had their papers and others were still waiting to get their papers”. Clearly, this approach was in conflict with the bureaucratic reception system, and the volunteers often complained about the official bureaucracy. They tried to help their new friends but the Finnish reception bureaucracy was described as a “complete hell”. A volunteer described the problems a friend had experienced:

The asylum seekers are in a vulnerable situation. The quota refugees, when they arrive, they have everything organised. The municipality has everything ready for them, but the municipality has nothing for the asylum seekers. There are no courses organised or anything, they have to find their own way and they have a lot of problems. I have helped [name] and he had to wait for three years for his decision. During the whole period he really had a hard time. It is really hard to live in uncertainty for this period of time. [...] And during this period, it was really difficult for him to find a place to stay and something to do. [...] The municipality has not provided anything for him. [...] There are activities at the reception centre, but if he wanted to visit his reception centre in Turku it took more than one hour to travel there, so it was not an option.
(WP3_UH_E026_P)

As described in this quotation, the problem to access integration measures becomes especially problematic when a decision on the asylum application may take several years. Both volunteers and asylum seekers found it incomprehensible why asylum seekers could not be given a place in integration courses for resettled refugees, or why the reception allowance given to asylum seekers living in their own accommodation was treated differently than the social support provided to all residents. For example, many of the asylum seekers found occasional small jobs that provided some income, which immediately decreased their reception allowance in a direct proportion to the income. In contrast, for a person who receives regular social benefits, rent and other accommodation costs are counted as a deductible expense, while this is not the case for asylum seekers. In general, from a local and practical perspective, the legal and administrative distinction between reception and integration did often not make sense, and the rules of the reception bureaucracy often seemed to work against the purpose of integration.

4. Policy Outcomes: Mechanisms of Convergence and Divergence in Policy Implementation

As outlined in this report, the policy outcome of the developments in the 2000s has been the increased centralisation of the governance of reception to the Finnish Immigration Service at the Ministry of the Interior. The strengthening of the administrative role of the Finnish Immigration Service has been a long-term development, which is not limited to the recent ten years. The first suggestions for a greater role of the Ministry of the Interior and its agency were raised by the ministry itself already in the early 2000s, and this goal was included in later government programmes. This policy outcome is mainly an administrative change, which has involved the change of the responsibility for the overall coordination and planning of tasks. Various tasks have been moved from other state authorities to the Finnish Immigration Service over a period of many years. The reasons for these administrative changes can at

least partly be found among the state administration itself. The Ministry of the Interior and successive governments have felt a need to improve the control of both the asylum seekers and the whole system, and to improve the efficiency of the system for economic reasons. The discourses that have dominated the changes have generally related to cost-saving measures, control and securitisation, and the internal administrative needs of the bureaucracy.

To follow the example of the EU and its member states, especially the neighbouring country of Sweden, is often mentioned in the interviews with experts and is also mentioned in documents arguing for the changes. Thus, this administrative change can also be interpreted as a European harmonisation of the Finnish administration. Thus, the change can be described as a *Europeanisation* of the Finnish immigration administration. It has to be noted, however, that this was not a change initiated by the increase of asylum seekers in 2015. The development to change the administration started already many years before the increase in the number of asylum seekers. The arrival of a large number of asylum seekers in 2015 did not bring about this development, but the arrivals in 2015 may have speeded up and may have provided a larger political support for the changes.

In general, the above-described development involving a strengthening of the centralisation of the administration as well as a bureaucratic coordination has undoubtedly *supported a convergence* of the services provided to asylum seekers (convergence is here meant as the process of becoming more similar/more homogeneous). This is not to suggest that the system was not centralised and bureaucratic before (in a traditional Weberian understanding of bureaucracy), it has probably always been relatively so in Finland. What this report suggests is that these tendencies towards convergence has been further strengthened. Various state authorities have always formally been in charge of the reception of asylum seekers in Finland, but today the administration has become centralised to a government agency, which has become increasingly professional and bureaucratic. For example, in Finland, municipalities cannot decide about the opening or closing of reception centres. Of course, the state authorities work together with municipalities and local civil society, but ultimately it is the state authorities that commissions the operator in question to open or close the reception centre. The municipalities have the power to decide if they wish to rent accommodation they own, and if they wish to sign agreements about resettlement of refugees, but also in these case economic considerations including state support play a significant role for the decisions made by the municipalities. This unequal relationship and delicate balance between state power and municipal autonomy is a fundamental part of public administration in Finland, and reception policies and practices have to adapt to this governance structure⁸. Yet, as the local cases of Laitila and Pargas indicates, local actors can still enjoy a considerable margin of manoeuvre, which can lead to divergence in the type of services offered. For example, in the case of the village of Nagu in Pargas, where activities were clearly integration-oriented rather than simply reception services.

The Europeanisation of asylum policies is evident in the legal changes in Finland. The development of the CEAS has, generally, found strong political support in Finland (cf. Wahlbeck 2019). The different directives of the CEAS have been transposed by amendments of Finnish laws and these legal changes

⁸ There is a political plan for a fundamental change of public administration in Finland. Provided the plan gets political support, it will involve the establishment of a new regional level of administration, which will move social and health services from the municipalities to the regional level. At the time of writing, the plans for this so-called “SOTE reform” are still vague, and political decisions have not yet been made, therefore this possible reform has not been presented in this report. The huge challenges and political objections that this reform faces provides evidence of the difficulty of changing the administrative relationships between the state and the local level.

have in general received strong political support. These legal changes have been described previously in this report. Most of the legal changes, even many that actually have not been demanded by the EU directives, have explicitly been explained by the government to be introduced to comply with an EU harmonisation of laws. Thus, the harmonisation of asylum laws has been relatively swift, efficient and widely supported in the case of Finland. To find support for legal changes, the government has explicitly and frequently referred to the EU and the “demands” of an EU harmonisation of laws and policies. In terms of legal developments, Europeanisation is evident and a key driving force.

In the actual practices, the changes of the asylum system have been smaller than what a look at the extensive legal changes would suggest. To the extent changes have happened in practices, these changes relate mainly to *reception* and not to integration measures. The legal changes of asylum policies have been fully implemented, but many practices were actually already in place before the CEAS and major changes of practices were therefore not needed. Many of the present practices of the reception system was already in place in the 1980s and have mainly gone through successive changes, without any major and abrupt changes of policy. The Finnish Red Cross is still running many of the reception centres and has been doing this for more than 30 years. Yet, there are new operators of reception centres that have emerged over the years; these operators have included state agencies, municipalities and most recently private companies. Furthermore, their operation has over the years become more professional. The operation of reception centres is controlled by detailed agreements between the service provider and the state authority that funds the operations. These standardised agreements obviously support a nation-wide *convergence* of service provisions in the reception centres. In general, the legal and bureaucratic developments, including increased centralisation of administration, detailed contracts with operators, the increased professionalism among both state and of the operators, have all together contributed to the convergence in the functioning, accessibility and quality of reception services

The lack of major and abrupt changes in practices can also be explained by the fact that the reception systems and integration programmes already from the beginning have been connected to the public services and bureaucratic structures of a developed welfare state. Changes in these official systems have only been possible by changes made in the applicable laws, and since many services were provided as general public services, abrupt changes in the governance system have not occurred because of legal and bureaucratic obstacles. Changes in services have occurred mainly in those reception services for asylum seekers that are not part of general public service.

In practice, it is the municipalities that provide many of the services to its residents. Since the municipalities have a degree of autonomy, there may be some *divergence* in the amount and type of services provided by municipalities (divergence here understood as the process of becoming more different/heterogeneous). For example, this may occur as differences among municipalities in the municipal integration programmes (cf. Koikkalainen, forthcoming). Much of the municipal services are, however, defined by law, and to the extent there is a divergence among municipalities, the variations concern various optional services not defined by law. The major municipal services connected to education, health and social services are, however, largely defined by law and should be fairly similar all over the country. It is an explicit goal of the government to make sure that major differences in public services among the regions and municipalities should not be the case.

The role of the municipalities has been more particular in reception activities. They provide a few services outside of the reception centres. For example, the municipal child protection agency [*lastensuojelu*], and the advice centres to pregnant mothers and newborn babies

[*neuvolapalvelut*] are good examples. These are services that municipalities provide according to the law. However, there is large difference among municipalities when it comes to providing services that are beyond what they are legally obliged to do. Thus, the municipalities have not very often provided additional services. And they have not very often opened reception centres run by the municipality itself. (WP3_UH_E013_P)

Among the municipalities there may, however, be major differences in terms of the involvement of the civil society. The civil society and the local politicians cannot influence the formal services provided to refugees and asylum seekers by law. Yet, civil society and politicians may play a decisive role for public opinions, social engagement and the various activities of civil society organisations. In Finland, the local branches of the Finnish Red Cross have played a large role in assisting asylum seekers with initial help and in a general welcoming of refugees in local society. There are also many other civil society organisations, including religious congregations, that have played a large role in a local context providing assistance for both refugees and asylum seekers. The two local case studies described above provide plenty of evidence for this. The civil society becomes pronounced in tasks that the municipalities have not had the staff, flexibility or possibility to organise. Clearly, in these types of issues involving civil society, there is a *divergence* among municipalities. Both the size, the economy, the geography, the traditions, the local political parties and numerous other variables may explain the divergence among municipalities in this respect. Yet, in Finland, civil society may be relatively powerless facing the centralised and bureaucratic reception system. Many of the local and civil society experts interviewed in this study found that they did not have enough possibility to influence the reception system. This concerned especially the opening and closing of reception centres, many interviewees felt that the practical and humanitarian arguments and the local knowledge was far too easily overrun by the economic arguments and bureaucratic logic that guided these decisions of the state authorities.

The centralised national system supports a convergence of the functioning, accessibility and quality of reception services. Yet, the system also involves structural conflicts of interest between local and national perspectives, which are strengthened by the legal and administrative division of reception and integration into two different areas of practice. The national interest and task of the state is to control and make reception efficient, while the local interest and the role of the municipality is to support integration. Taking into account that asylum seekers may have to wait for a decision in several years, integration is hampered by the uncertainty of the status of the applicant, while the role of local civil society becomes more and more important for the availability of services. A further line of conflict may emerge between the activism of civil society and NGOs and the bureaucracy of the state providing equal (and impersonal) services. These lines of division contribute to a divergence in the availability of services. Yet, the NGOs and civil society can hardly change the actual functioning of the system. The well-organised NGOs have been able to influence government programmes and policies at a national level, but local grass-root activism can only influence local contexts and not the system itself. In conclusion, the reception system in Finland is largely a centralised, top-down, bureaucratic, state-led system, where the municipalities and civil society are key implementation partners, but they can only indirectly and marginally influence the governance of the reception system.

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Appendix 1. List of Official Documents

Finnish Legal Acts and Decrees

Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (746/2011) ("Reception Act").

- Defines reception services and implements the EU Reception Conditions Directive.

Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) ("Integration Act").

- Governs issues of immigrant integration and resettlement and defines the responsibility of various Finnish authorities.

Act on the Application of Residence based Social Security Legislation. (No. 1573/1993.)

Act on the Treatment of Aliens Placed in Detention and Detention Units (116/2002)

Act on the Register of Aliens (1270/1997)

Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003)

Act on the Finnish Immigration Service (156/1995)

Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)

Act on the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (1326/2014)

Act on the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal (1327/2014)

Act on Home Affairs Funds (903/2014)

Act on the Finnish Red Cross (238/2000).

Child Welfare Act (417/2007)

Finnish Aliens Act (301/2004).

- Governs immigration and the rights of non-citizens. Among other issues the law implements the EU Qualification Directive and the Asylum Procedure Directive.

Finnish Nationality Act (359/2003).

- Sets out the conditions for granting Finnish nationality.

Health Care Act (66/1972)

Local Government Act (410/2015).

- Among other issues, the law defines the relationship between state and municipalities.

Government Decree on Nationality (293/2013)

Government Decree on the Finnish Immigration Service (193/2002)

Government Decree on Home Affairs Funds (1148/2017)

Government Decree on Fees and Compensations for the Representatives of Unaccompanied Children (1394/2014)

Ministry of the Interior Decree on Fees for Services Provided by the Finnish Immigration Service (872/2017)

Municipal Documents

Town of Laitila. Municipal Council. minutes of meetings 2008-2018

Town of Laitila. Municipal Board (Municipal Executive Committee). minutes of meetings 2008-2018.

Vakka-Suomi seudullinen kotouttamisohjelma vuosille 2015-2017 [the municipal integration programme for the town of Laitila and five neighbouring municipalities]

Town of Pargas. Municipal Council. minutes of meetings 2008-2018

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Other Reports and Documents

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- Statement of the Central Union for Child Welfare on the development of the reception of, and representation system of, unaccompanied minors.

Finnish Immigration Service. 2018. *Maahanmuuttoviraston selvitys sisäministerille turvapaikkapäätöksentekoon ja -menettelyyn liittyen* Helsinki: Finnish Immigration Service.

- A requested report of the Finnish Immigration Service to the Minister of Interior concerning asylum application decision-making and processes.

Finnish Red Cross, Regional district of South-West Finland. Annual reports of activities 2014-2016.

Finnish Red Cross, Regional district of Åboland. 2016. *Nauvon Vastaanottokeskuksen Toimintakertomus 15.10.2015-30.4.2016*.

- A 17-page report on the activities of the Finnish Red Cross reception centre in Nagu.

Kuntaliitto [Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities]. 2016. *Pakolaisten vastaanotto kunnissa* [Reception of Refugees in the Municipalities]. Helsinki: Kuntaliitto.

- A 10-page report that sets out the principles of the governance of reception and integration, and outlines the position of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities in this regard.

Kuntaliitto [Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities]. 2016. Lausunto Eduskunnan työ- ja elinkeinojaostolle 30.9.2016, dnro 938/03/2016. HE134/2016 vp Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle valtion talousarvioksi vuodelle 2017, teema: kotouttaminen.

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- A report on how to develop the reception system of unaccompanied minors.

Norrback, Ole. 2008. *Maahanmuuttohallinnon ja Maahanmuuttoviraston toiminnan kehittäminen* (Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 15/2008). Helsinki; The Ministry of the Interior.

- A commissioned report to the Ministry of the Interior on the development of the activities of the Immigration Administration and the Finnish Immigrant Service.

Valtioneuvoston oikeuskansleri [The Chancellor of Justice]. 2016. Decision Dnro OKV/1200/1/2015.

- A decision on the lawfulness of the actions of the Finnish Immigration Service in relation to the competition for the opening of reception centres and the purchase of reception services. The

complaint to the Chancellor of Justice concerned the presumed privileged position of the Finnish Red Cross when new contracts were negotiated in 2015.

Valtioneuvoston oikeuskansleri [The Chancellor of Justice]. 2017. Decision Dnro OKV/8/50/2016.

- A decision and report of the inspection of the work and the decisions of the Finnish Immigration Service, including a reprimand of some issues that needs to be taken into account.

Official Programmes of the Government of Finland

Vanhanen 2007-2010

Kiviniemi 2010-2011

Katainen 2011-2014

Stubb 2014-2015

Sipilä 2015-present

Appendix 2. List of Interviews

WP3_UH_E011_P: Senior Expert, Director at the Ministry of the Interior

WP3_UH_E012_P: Senior civil servant, State agency

WP3_UH_E013_P: Senior civil servant, State agency

WP3_UH_E014_P: Junior Expert, regional NGO

WP3_UH_E015_P: Local Volunteer

WP3_UH_E016_P: Municipal worker

WP3_UH_E017_P: National NGO employee

WP3_UH_E018_P: Municipal worker

WP3_UH_E019_P: Municipal worker

WP3_UH_E020_P: Local volunteer

WP3_UH_E021_P: Local politician

WP3_UH_E022_P: Local politician

WP3_UH_E023_P: Coordinator at a Regional District of the Finnish Red Cross

WP3_UH_E024_P: Senior Expert, regional NGO

WP3_UH_E025_P: Local politician

WP3_UH_E026_P: Local volunteer

WP3_UH_E027_P: Local volunteer

WP3_UH_E028_P: Local volunteer

WP3_UH_E029_P: Local volunteer



The research project CEASEVAL (“Evaluation of the Common European Asylum System under Pressure and Recommendations for Further Development”) is an interdisciplinary research project led by the Institute for European studies at Chemnitz University of Technology (TU Chemnitz), funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 770037.) It brings together 14 partners from European countries aiming to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the CEAS in terms of its framework and practice and to elaborate new policies by constructing different alternatives of implementing a common European asylum system. On this basis, CEASEVAL will determine which kind of harmonisation (legislative, implementation, etc.) and solidarity is possible and necessary.